

Early girls' marriage in Tajikistan: Causes and continuity

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Signature:

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Abstract

Although there is little official data, early girls' marriage before the age of 18 appears to have increased in Tajikistan over recent years, due to the limited socio-economic opportunities.

This study aimed to explore the main causes behind the fall in the age of marriage for girls. As Tajikistan is based on patriarchal values, where family is the core of decision-making, the study looks into the family dynamics and interrelationships to analyse the driving forces behind the decision to arrange marriage for the girls at an earlier age. Using triangulated methods of qualitative data collection, such as interviews, focus group discussions and case studies, the study was conducted in urban, semi rural/semi urban and rural areas of Tajikistan.

The findings confirm that early marriage exists in Tajikistan. Although marriage has always been important for Tajiks, recently early age of marriage has been more prioritized. The young girls today leave school when they reach puberty, limit their socialization with their friends outside of the house and rigorously learn skills that qualify them as a 'desirable' *kelin* [bride] to increase their chances of getting a marriage proposal within what is a short marriage window. At the same time, the study argues that the family decision to pursue an early age of marriage for daughters is not because of the low status of the women as it has been suggested in some earlier research. Instead, the study argues that marriage is a strategy to provide girls with what is often the only opportunity of an economically and socially secure future in the country under the current socio-economic and political context. Relations within the families are more complicated than dominant-subordinate as previously portrayed but are based on respect, love and responsibility towards each other. This 'connectivity' assists in shaping the girls as potent Tajik women ready for their future roles of mothers and wives. The young girls, as this study suggests, are usually not completely powerless either, as they exercise the limited agency provided by the patriarchal system and actively engage in negotiating their interests.

Thus, the study aimed to (1) draw attention to the issue of early marriage among girls in Tajikistan and (2) to contribute to the scholarly discussion on early marriage and on gender and family dynamics in Tajikistan. Based on the findings, it is recommended that more research needs to be conducted to discuss the phenomenon of early girls' marriage in Tajikistan. Further, legal, political and social changes are necessary to provide a safety net for women married at an early age but divorced or abandoned later. Although bringing changes to the marriage values might be a challenging task, it is hoped that this research and others similar to this one will demonstrate the importance of the issue and will result in appropriate attention and an effective policy response.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The phenomenon of early/child marriage

1.1 The problem statement

Background

In winter of 2009 when the world was so concerned with new types of influenza, I worked for the World Health Organization as a short-term consultant. Together with an international anthropologist, we travelled to urban and rural areas to collect qualitative information to discover the level of awareness among the Tajik population about the flu and ways of its treatment. Even though I have always been aware of the living conditions of people in Tajikistan, I was once again devastated by the reality. The poverty was so extreme in some areas that even I, a person born and raised in the country was shocked. During the winter the electricity supply is limited to only a few hours or completely cut almost everywhere in Tajikistan. Even though it was early spring, the people seemed exhausted from the everyday struggle to keep the house warm and get food for their children. One scene in particular remained with me for a very long time and finally effected the choices I made in the next few months.

We entered a flat where we were invited into a small room as the only warm place in the house. The room was airless and dark as the windows were covered with a blanket to keep the warmth in. A young woman, Manzura, sat near *gavhara* [a cot] crying. She stopped immediately as she saw us, potential

guests, and just like any Tajik woman demonstrated hospitality welcoming us to their house. She placed a *kurpacha* [a traditional seat] near the wall where we could sit and started preparing the tea. After a while, she joined us for the interview. All the questions we asked were about the flu, as that was the purpose of our project. Manzura however, managed to answer them by focusing on her life, as she seemed desperate to share it with someone.

It turned out that she was 16 years old and this was her husband's flat, which they shared with his mother and two sisters. The baby in *gavhora* was hers and he was only 2 months old. Manzura seemed very distressed. According to her, she got married about a year ago at the age of 15. Her own family struggled financially so when the mother of her future husband came to arrange the marriage, everybody, including her were happy. However, her mother-in-law did not mention a few rather important facts about the groom; he was 40 years old, a widower with three children all of whom are mentally disabled. Manzura described the moment she found out about the fraud, as shocking at how easily she and her whole family were tricked into this marriage. According to her, the happiness about the marriage turned into despair and she spent days after the wedding crying and demanding to return to her mother. Her mother however, who was similarly unhappy with the arrangement, persuaded her to accept her fate now, as returning back home would only cause gossip and would damage her reputation, which could result in no other marriage proposals at all.

Manzura said she stayed in the marriage only because she was still hoping for the best. Unfortunately, however, things got even more complicated for her. As she was only 16 years old, she was accused of being useless and unable to

take good care of her husband's disabled children. Moreover, she became a burden and an 'additional mouth to feed' to her husband and his mother, who both worked at the local market. The small amount of money and food they brought home was hidden from Manzura because she did not 'deserve' it. As a mother who had to breastfeed her child, Manzura confessed she was hungry most of the time. At the same time, finding a job was not an option for her. First of all, she had to look after her husband's children and her own two month old baby; and second she did not have any labour skills she could use to support herself financially.

The international anthropologist seemed concerned that the discussion was going the wrong way and moving away from the flu problem. I was, however, very touched and engaged by the story and this young woman's fate. I left the few *somonis* [Tajik money] I had in my pocket for Manzura, which I hoped she could use to buy her some food. The question however of what the future holds for Manzura, and many other young Tajik women who are married at such young age, was on my mind for a very long time.

Study aim and research question

Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in Central Asian region. While it has always been poor among other republics even during the Soviet Union period (Falkingham, 2000), the collapse of the Union resulted in a worsening of the socio-economic and political situation in the country. After gaining its independence in 1991, Tajikistan experienced a five-year civil war, which

severely damaged the already weak economic infrastructure, resulted in a sharp decline of the overall situation, and had an enormous impact on people's living condition. With the latest poverty rate in the country of over 40%, poverty hit the women particularly strong creating 'feminization' of poverty in the country (EU Gender Watch, 2007). Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asian region where women's welfare has declined significantly since the country gained independence in 1992 (Falkingham, 2000). In contrast to the Soviet Union period, when women were targeted to be 'emancipated', the years following the independence of the country, women are now described as having returned to pre-Soviet norms of living. Thus, while Communists encouraged or even forced women to actively participate and contribute to the social and economic development of the country, in the later years women returned to their traditional roles of mothers and wives¹. Moreover, women's general well-being and living condition worsened recently in Tajikistan. As the Tajikistan Gender Review (World Bank, 2005) indicates, Tajik women in the years following independence, suffered from more illness and domestic violence, earned less money and had less labour market opportunities than men. The gender gap in secondary and higher education increased, leaving women illiterate and with no basic skills to support themselves financially later on in life (UNICEF, 2003). Women's health deteriorated with health care becoming unaffordable and discriminated against women (Falkingham, 2003). In the light of this context,

¹ The modernization of women during the Soviet Union received a thorough and contradictory analysis in a literature. It is thus more complicated than stating women were emancipated during the Communists period. See chapter 3 for historical review of the women situation in Tajikistan.

families' practices and attitudes to marriage have changed and marriage has gained economic status apart from its usual social status².

According to the legislation, the current age of marriage is 18 for both men and women in the country³. However, as the mechanism for the implementation of the legislation does not exist, young Tajik girls enter the marriage market at an earlier age. While the age of marriage has not been studied in the country previously, the economic importance of marriage has been noted. Thus according to the SADC report (2002), the rate of polygamous marriage increased in Tajikistan following the collapse of the Soviet Union where families agreed to a marriage of their daughters as second or third wives. Along with polygamy, bigamous marriages have also been reported in the region, when a woman gets married a second time without divorcing her first husband, to support her family and children financially (Brusina, 2009).

Today, as this particular study describes, most of the girls quit school, abandon the idea of finding employment and thus becoming economically independent and agree to a marriage as early as at the age of 15. As this study attempts to demonstrate, the falling age of marriage in the last few years is due to the limited socio-economic opportunities, which do not enable young women to be fully independent. At the same time the state's rhetoric on the traditional role of a Tajik female pushes the girls further into choosing marriage and perceiving it as the only possible future in most cases.

² See chapter 3 for changes in families' practices throughout various historical times in Tajikistan.

³ Family code of Republic of Tajikistan.

The encounter with Manzura above, who was married at the age of 15, therefore was the trigger for initiation of the current study. Although Manzura's case is a clear demonstration of the consequences of early marriage, finding out the reasons for the occurrence of such a marriage was more puzzling for me. If the consequences are as serious as in Manzura's case, I was curious why families would agree to a marriage of their daughters at such young age. This thesis as a result, explores the following research questions: what makes Tajik families choose an early marriage for their daughters⁴? What is the driving force behind such a decision?

While exploring the questions the main argument of this study is that the families' decisions in regards to the age of marriage for girls in contemporary Tajikistan is influenced significantly by the socio-economic and political context. Early marriage is chosen, at least for the girls met in this study, because of limited opportunities available to girls to secure their future socially but most importantly financially.

The thesis has three main goals:

1. To draw attention to the phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan.

The phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan has not yet received adequate attention in scholarly discussions or in international projects developed in the country to support women or to attract government attention to the phenomenon. Gender related issues, on the other hand, have been explored by scholars in Tajikistan and Central Asia and such questions as

⁴ See chapter 2 for discussion of families' decision-making process in Tajik families

family relations, gender dynamics, domestic violence, bride abduction, and women's role during and after the Soviet Union period have been widely discussed⁵. At the same time, although early marriage can be at the root of each phenomenon above, the phenomenon is left unexplored.

Moreover, while the Tajik government ratified such international treaties as the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or UNICEF's Child Rights Convention (CRC) and has developed gender related programs with the support of international organizations, no projects currently tackle the issue of child marriage in any form. The current government however has introduced legislation on minimum marriage age to prevent early marriage, as I will discuss later in the thesis. Nevertheless, because the issue is not recognized on a national level, the legislation is not implemented and remains relevant only on paper. It has to be mentioned here that in the recent years, as the phenomenon of child marriage has gained international recognition, Tajikistan has started to discuss openly the practice for the first time (UNFPA, 2012).

2. Identify the possible reasons for early marriage occurrence in the country as a means to find any relevant steps that could be taken to reduce and prevent the phenomenon from occurring.

With the detailed focus on the phenomenon of early marriage in the context of Tajikistan, I would like to examine the reasons behind the decision of Tajik families to choose marriage at an early age for girls. Marriage, although always

⁵ See chapters 2 and 3 for the literature review of gender related issues and other research on Tajikistan and Central Asia.

important in Tajik society (as discussed in chapter 3), has gained economic significance in recent years. I therefore argue that whilst Tajik families might be patriarchal and function through dominance and authority, they do not chose early marriage as a result of the low status of girls in the families (Poliakov 1992, Harris 2004) or because they are subject to discrimination and abuse (Haarr 2007). Marriage, as this study tries to demonstrate, has become a way of providing girls with social and financial security in a country where other opportunities are limited. Although in many cases, as the empirical chapters will show, marriage fails the expectations of the families, it is still sometimes preferred as the only available option.

3. Contribute to the scholarly discussion of (1) child/early marriage and (2) gender relations in Tajikistan.

Child marriage in the context of developing countries have received significant attention from scholars in recent years. The current focus on child marriage has increased our understanding of the causes and consequence of this practice in other countries. At the same time, however, gaps remain. To the best of my knowledge, studies exploring the child marriage, fail to examine the phenomenon from a family perspective. This is a key mission from any discussion of consequences, determinants or possible solutions for child marriage phenomenon. While families are described as the main decision makers no study examines family dynamics or analyses the attitude and opinion of family members as individuals in regards to such a practice. At the same time families in societies such as Tajikistan are described as authoritarian and dominant where the women have the lowest status (Bastug and Hortacsu, 2000, Haarr, 2010, Harris, 2004, Mincses, 1980, Poliakov, 1992). Early marriage

is therefore generally associated with the women's low status and is seen as a characteristic of patriarchal societies. Scholars generally appear to neglect the possibility that early marriage could be a result of such family attributes, as care and economic protection for the girls in societies where other opportunities are limited.

That said it is important to recognize the negative consequences of child marriage as will be described later in this chapter. My attempt therefore is not to protect the practice in any way or suggest analysing the phenomenon through a cultural relativist approach. I would like to demonstrate, however, how families look into the marriage as a way of improving the girls' future at the same time have little control over what the future holds for their daughters. Thus, choosing early age of marriage they rely on 'destiny' and are hopeful the marriage choice will turn out to be a successful one. It should be mentioned here also that, economic security, does not just mean being financially supported. As I will demonstrate in detail in empirical chapters, for Tajik women, who move to their husband's household after the marriage, finding a 'proper' husband also means securing a home to live their lives in, bring up their children and becoming a fully established 'owner' of the household, after their mother-in-law.

The last significant reason for exploring the phenomenon of early marriage is to make a modest contribution to the current discussions of male-female dynamics in Tajikistan. Through this thesis, I am hoping to bring a new argument into analysing Tajik families, particularly in relation to the women. I demonstrate that the family dynamics in Tajik families described as patriarchal, where women are subordinate, is in fact more complex. Although I agree that families are based on gender and age dominance, I intend to demonstrate that

families are also capable of sharing love, affection and most importantly respect towards each other, including the women, emotions and bonds that usually are missed in scholarly discussion of patriarchal families.

Drawing on Suad Joseph's concept of patriarchal connectivity (1999)⁶, I show how through daily interactions, family members assist in shaping each other's identity to prepare competent Tajik individuals who would be able to live within the existing social order. Marriage is therefore, as I argue, not a tool to suppress the women but is an attempt to protect them. At the same time, I demonstrate that the women are not completely powerless and all the decisions are not made for them by other family members. While Harris (2004) discussed this issue previously, I suggest a different view when analysing women 'resistance'. I argue in chapter eight, that women living in the dominant society, do not necessarily need to resist the dominance and 'desire' to free themselves. The women are able to live under gender and age dominance and yet still ensure their own self-interest due to the intimate connections they share with each other. Patriarchal connectivity and expression of agency are thus for me interconnected. These two views, suggested here, connectivity and agency, should encourage further research or discussions.

Rationale for the study

Analysing the phenomenon of early marriage is important for several reasons. Although arranged with benign reasons, early marriage did not result

⁶See chapter 2 below for detailed explanation of the theories used in this study.

in the 'ideal marriage' for most of the women⁷. First of all early age of marriage affects young girls own welfare. As young Tajik girls, the respondents of this study, got ready for being married at an early age, most of them quit school. As a result, the girls had not only limited literacy and little general knowledge but they also lacked skills they could use to earn money and financially support themselves and their children in future. Moreover, girls met in this study did not know their legal rights; they had limited decision-making powers or even ideas and were looking forward to depending on financial support provided by their future husbands or in-laws. The lack of labour skills further diminished girls' economic situation, driving them into extreme poverty in cases of divorce or abandonment. It should be noted here, however, that in most of the cases, even women with higher education struggled to find jobs due to high unemployment rate that affected the country. Another important outcome of the limited literacy or knowledge of the women was the influence on the next generation of young Tajiks. Mothers who are universally known as the 'first teachers' of the children, in the cases of girls observed during the fieldwork did not have enough knowledge to share with their children. These women were not likely to bring up children who would be able to make different choices from their mothers.

Secondly, the early age of girls' marriage has an effect on the wider socio-economic situation of the country. Due to limited opportunities, a significant number of women do not participate in the official labour market. Women met during this study were occupied in mostly self-employment type of jobs, for

⁷ No previous study looks into the consequences of early marriage in Tajikistan as mentioned throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, unsuccessful marriages seemed very common in the country during the fieldwork for this study. I met several such women myself and heard numerous stories about women who faced most of the consequences of early marriage. A separate study however should be conducted to analyse such consequences in the context of Central Asia and Tajikistan.

example, beauty salons or small traditional dressmaking business and they struggled economically. Their participation in the *official* labour market however decreased in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to a recent labour market review, the level of labour non-participation among women is twice that of men; the rate among women of childbearing age is six times higher in comparison to the men of the same age (European Training Foundation, 2010). The low level of participation in the labour market of women could be primarily associated with the promotion of their traditional role. The women's role as mothers and wives was also prioritized by families as a result of the current government's policies⁸. As I will demonstrate later in the empirical chapters, people on the ground believed the state encouraged early marriage, due to the signals the state has been sending in recent years about the role of traditional Tajik women. Additionally, the low level of participation in the formal education and lack of employment opportunities contributed to the non-participation of women in the labour market. As a result the country has limited its labour force that could make a significant contribution to its development if trained and educated appropriately and if provided with proper employment.

1.2 Defining child vs early marriage

To this point, I have used the term 'early marriage' to describe the early age of marriage for girls. However, the phenomenon is mostly known under a term 'child marriage'. In this section, therefore I explore the notion of 'child marriage'

⁸ See chapters 3 and 9 below

as it has been portrayed in the literature. I demonstrate that the term 'child' and the age frame it covers does not apply universally. The term 'child' particularly creates confusion when analysing such practices as marriage, where young girls are identified as children by certain International treaties and yet some communities, such as Tajikistan, do not perceive those girls culturally as children.

The phenomenon of child marriage, as mentioned earlier, has generally received significant attention and discussion recently. According to Gaffney-Rhys (2010) child marriage attracted public attention starting in 2009, when a Bill was introduced to the US House of Representatives aimed at preventing child marriage and protecting girls in developing countries. Consequently, international organizations, such as the UN has focused on this issue in developing countries in the last years to analyse the phenomenon and to eliminate its practice. Similarly, the first celebration of a Girl Child day, started in 2012, was dedicated to elimination of child marriage practices throughout the world. At the same time, academic interest increased towards the phenomenon and it was analysed from all the possible aspects⁹.

According to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC), a child is a person below the age of eighteen. Child marriage is thus defined by UN organizations as 'one involving a person below the age of eighteen' (Gaffney-Rhys, 2010, p. 6). Consequently, the international community urged countries that ratified such international treaties as CRC or CEDAW (Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women) to introduce or amend national laws and policies to eradicate the practice of child

⁹ See section 3 in the current chapter and chapter 2 for scholarly work on child marriage

marriage (Gaffney-Rhys, 2010). Gaffney-Rhys (2010) argues that child marriage must be treated as a human rights issue to emphasize the 'gravity of the matter' (p.9). The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (cited in UNICEF, 2001) states that individuals have the right to enter marriage under their own will and consent. The argument therefore goes that, with child marriage, when one of the partners is immature, consent cannot be freely given (UNICEF, 2001). However, Gaffney-Rhys (2010) argues further that the instruments directed to eliminating child marriage phenomenon globally are not as clear as they could be. The only global document, forbidding child marriage is CEDAW, which fails to define the notion of a child altogether (Gaffney-Rhys, 2010).

The term child however does 'vary enormously' between time, space and community (Bunting, 2005, p. 21). Bunting (2005) commends the approach of the sociology of childhood approach that emphasises the social and historical context of childhood when analysing child marriage in different countries. Citing Bridgeman and Monk (2000), Bunting concludes that 'childhood is not a natural, universal category; rather, discourses of childhood are culturally specific, socially constructed, and conflicting or contradictory' (p. 21). Moreover, the term childhood is even more complicated when looking at the adolescent stage. Adolescence is defined as a transition between childhood and adulthood where an individual 'no longer possesses the characteristics ascribed to children (presumably innocence, naturalness, etc.), but he/she also has not reached the ultimate state of adulthood (which includes, it appears, taking on certain gendered roles and being responsible)' (Macleod, 2003, p. 425). In some

societies marriage is therefore a process towards gaining maturity and full membership of the community (Masquelier, 2005).

In a Tajik context, there is no clear division between the age category of childhood or adolescence. Roche (2009) in her discussion of Tajik youth focuses on the age span of 'not yet mature young men' (p.108). Her notion of the male youth therefore does not discuss the notion of adolescents separately. For Roche the maturity for the young men is gained through several life cycle processes, marriage among them. Her work therefore indicates the lack of a concept of 'adolescence' in the context of Tajikistan. Although Roche' work focuses on Tajik men, she briefly mentions that maturity for Tajik girls is associated with biological determinants, such as breast development, body size and menstruation (2010, p.106). This brief description however is in accordance with my own findings from the fieldwork in Tajikistan. The majority of girls who were preparing for the marriage, in this study, were below the age of 18 and thus could be classified as children in accordance to Child Rights Convention ratified in the country. Girls, as I demonstrate in the empirical chapters (see below), stopped being recognized as children in the communities where they live years before they entered the marriage market, which is the age of 15 for the majority of girls in this study.

Once the girl reaches the age of marriage, she turns from a little girl into a potential bride. To signal this transition, Tajik people use various idioms. Thus, a little girl known as a child is referred to as '*dukhtarcha*', literally meaning a little girl. Once a girl enters the age of 14 signalling her puberty she becomes '*dukhtar*'. The term '*dukhtar*' therefore means a young girl, who is not a child any longer but who is not a mature woman yet. The term '*dukhtar*' as a

representation of a young girl, therefore also is associated with virginity. *'Dukhtar'* is therefore an unmarried, sexually pure young Tajik girl who is in transition to becoming a *'zanak'* or a mature woman. *'Dukhtar'* accordingly becomes a *'zanak'* only when she gets married and becomes sexually active. For this specific reason, my referral to the young girls during the fieldwork as *'dukhtarcha'* [a child] created confusion. When I introduced my study literally as marriage of a *'dukhtarcha'* or *'child marriage'* most of the people denied the existence of such practices in Tajikistan. Participants argued with me trying to prove that child marriage stopped being practiced in the country since the Soviet Union. The defensiveness was created by the existing community norms. People found it outrageous, that I assumed that a *'dukhtarcha'* who is biologically not ready for the marriage yet, might be married off in Tajikistan. Even though it was common that the little girls were betrothed to be married when they were *'dukhtarcha'* and therefore in pre-puberty age, the marriage itself could happen only when girls reached puberty. Only when indicating the age range that I was interested in did the participants understand the issue being discussed. Nevertheless, many times, particularly when speaking to the professionals during individual interviews, I was advised to change the title of my thesis from 'child' to 'early' marriage. Even though the term 'early' also was not supported by many participants in this study, as they believed the age of 15 was not early for a girl to get married, the decision was to adhere to this particular term. Consequently, while the phenomenon discussed in this thesis is known mostly as 'child marriage', in the context of Tajikistan the term 'early' seemed more appropriate.

1.3 The consequences of child marriage

As stated earlier the focus of this study is on the reasons behind the occurrence of early/child marriage and not the consequences themselves. That said, the consequences are important to consider and indeed it was the awareness of the consequences that initiated the current study. In this section, therefore, I would like to set these in a wider context by identifying some of the issues described in the literature on the outcomes of early marriage for young women in other societies.

It has to be mentioned, that both boys and girls experience early marriage but due to the particular severity of the consequences girls face as a result of such marriage, the phenomenon is generally identified as a harmful practice only in relation to girls. Although early or teenage marriage have also been discussed in the context of industrialized countries, I limit the literature review in this section to developing countries only. This is first of all, because 'child marriage' is more prevalent in developing countries. According to current estimates, about 82 million girls in developing countries aged 10 and 17 will be married by the age of 18, while 163 million of the 331 million girls aged 10 and 19 will be married before they reach 20 (Bruce, 2002 cited in Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). Secondly, as Tajikistan is classified as a developing country and thus has more similarities to the latter, reviewing the consequences in similar countries seems more appropriate. It is important to note that the majority of the literature discusses the marriage of girls before the age of 18, because as mentioned earlier, a person below 18 years of age is considered a child by international standards. Girls discussed in the literature therefore are those who got married regardless of whether they had reached puberty or not. While most

girls interviewed for this study in Tajikistan were also younger than 18 years of age, they got married only after they reached puberty.

Among one of the most serious implications for the young brides is related to health complications. As their body is physically not ready for reproduction yet, girls aged 10-12 are 5-7% under more risk of dying during childbirth than girls aged 15-19 (Nour, 2006). At the same time child mortality rate is also higher among the mothers giving birth at an early age. If a mother is under the age of 18, her baby is 60% more likely to die during the first year than a baby born to a mother older than 19 (UNICEF, 2001). Physical immaturity also results in high rates of Vesico-Vaginal Fistula, a condition common among mothers whose pelvis and birth canal are not fully developed. During labour, the relentless pressure damages the birth canal causing breakage to the bladder and resulting in uncontrollable urine leakage (UNICEF, 2001). In Nigeria 88% of women with fistula are among girls aged 10-15 (UNICEF, 1998). About two million adolescent girls live with fistula in the world today and the number increases by 100,000 in a year (Nour, 2006). Cervical cancer is also reported to be higher among females who are married at a young age, which is associated with long term usage of oral contraceptives and poor genital hygiene (Chaouki et al., 1998).

A different health related difficulty of child brides is the high rate of HIV/AIDS infection among young females. Some societies hold the belief that that an early marriage can prevent young girls from HIV infection (Nour, 2006). In reality however, according to Nour (2006), young girls are physiologically more prone to HIV infection, as their vagina has not yet developed the protective cells necessary for protection from any sexually transmitted diseases. The data

collection in Demographic and Health Surveys from 31 countries demonstrates that married girls are under more risk of HIV infection due to the pressure of proving their fertility and thus having unprotected sex more often (Bruce and Clark, 2004).

The psychological effect is another consequence of child marriage, which unfortunately has received limited attention in the literature. The few psychological disadvantages mentioned by UNICEF (2001) are forced sexual relations, denial of freedom and personal development. According to UNICEF (2001) girls married off at an early age experience isolation, as they are surrounded by people considering such marriage a norm and believe the girls do not need support. In Ethiopia, elders regard the traumas the young girls go through, such as premature sex and childbearing, as socially unavoidable (Tsehai, 1993 cited in UNICEF, 2001).

When a girl is married before puberty, it is agreed between the families that girls will not be engaged in sexual intercourse with their husbands until they are mature. However, in many cases, particularly when the husband is older, cases of forced intercourse with the wife as old as eight years old is reported (UNICEF, 2001). UNICEF (2001) found out that in 16 sub-Saharan countries, husbands of 15-19 year old girls are on average 10 years older than their wives. This in turn creates a power imbalance between spouses. As a result women who are married younger are more likely to be beaten or threatened by their husbands (UNICEF, 2005). Jensen and Thornton (2003) found that in the majority of cases, women justify the physical abuse believing that a man has the right to physically punish his wife when necessary. The age disparity however can also be advantageous. According to Westoff (2003), older

husbands are in a better position to provide for their wives and families.

However when the age difference is significant, the wife is also more likely to be widowed or abandoned (UNICEF, 2001). In Java, a study found out that girls married earlier are three times more likely be divorced than those married later (Savitridina, 1997). Such women not only cannot support themselves and their children financially but they are also poorly treated in certain societies.

A further related phenomenon is the incidence of polygamous unions. According to UNICEF (2005) 40% of girls in Haiti who were married before the age of 18 are second or third wives. In such unions, the child wife's position is even more complicated. As Mikhail (2002) demonstrates girls married in polygamous unions find themselves in a role of serving the other wives. Polygamous marriages are therefore opposed by international community exactly due to its violation of woman's dignity, which usually occurs in such unions (Gaffney-Rhys, 2010).

The socio-economic effect is also significant. First of all child marriage have been identified as a barrier to education among girls. Young girls are more likely to not attend the school in societies where child marriage is widespread (UNICEF, 2005). The rate of the females in school decreases once they reach the "marriage" age (Guday, 2005). As education has been encouraged as a tool for reinforcing the decision making power of the women (Malhotra and Mather, 1997), girls who drop out school in order to be married are therefore of a great concern among the international community. The lack of literacy has been associated with the girls' opportunity to develop their intellectual abilities. Girls without educational opportunities, grow up lacking knowledge about their legal rights or developing their own point of view and decision making skills (Otoo-

Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). Although it has been demonstrated that a correlation between age of marriage and labour force participation among women exists (Ragui and Zouari, 2003), the majority of women are unable to return to labour force even when they have no other choice. Thus, according to UNICEF (2001) lack of schooling also means no qualifications or skills for women who have to find work. As a result illiterate women who are abandoned by their husbands end up living in extreme poverty. Early marriage, therefore, contributes to the 'feminization of poverty' and has a long term impact on children (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003, UNICEF, 2001).

In summary, this section has demonstrated the consequences of child marriage for girls. Although boys and girls are both exposed to marriage at an early age, the research focus has been on girls due to the severe consequences girls face because of early marriage. Marriage at an early age has serious physical and psychological effects on girls and marginalizes them socially and economically. Although some of the mentioned negative consequences are associated with pre-pubertal marriage, in general the negative consequences similar to some of those identified in the case of Tajikistan. No literature discusses the phenomenon of early marriage in Central Asian context and Tajikistan but specific gender issues identified in the previous research in the region can be associated with the early age of marriage among girls. Thus, extreme poverty among women, health complications, domestic violence, low levels of school attendance and involvement in official employment are several issues identified in the region, which could be related to the marriage preference at an earlier age. However, even though

understanding the consequences of such practice is very important, addressing the phenomenon would not be possible without analysing the causes behind early/child marriage occurrence. While the literature discusses most of such causes in other countries, this study is the first to analyse the causes in the context of Tajikistan.

1.4 Use of the literature

I use various sources of literature in this thesis. Tajikistan and Central Asia as a whole, is a comparatively new area for the western scholars, who started working in region only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1995. On the other hand, however, the region has always been open to the Russian scholars. Therefore, when writing this thesis, I refer to the western scholars' work in the region where possible. At the same time, the Russian literature, as the first to discuss the history of Central Asia and the family structure is used to construct part of chapter two and three.

As a theoretical framework, I refer to the studies conducted in a context similar to Tajikistan. The theory is therefore based on the work of such Middle Eastern scholars as Suad Joseph, Saba Mahmood, Diane Baxter and others. Studies based on Middle Eastern family relationships seem more relevant for analyzing the findings of this study than western literature. Of course, Middle Eastern societies are Islamic, where the patriarchal structure in the families is long established and accepted in the academia. Tajikistan on the other hand is not an Islamic state; the religion although has always been part of a Tajik identity is a new and emerging phenomenon. At the same time, however, Tajik

society and Tajik families have also been described as patriarchal and dominant and therefore with similar to Middle Eastern families' values. For that reason, the Middle Eastern studies I draw upon, are conducted by the women as the 'insiders', who either come from the society they are describing or they grew up in families ruled by the principles of the dominant society. As unfortunately, Tajik families have not yet been analyzed by women living under the Tajik family values, I find the above mentioned studies more relevant than the western literature.

The third type of literature I use in the thesis is particularly focused on the issue of early/child marriage in developing countries. Although there is a literature analyzing early marriage in industrialized countries, as mentioned earlier, the reasons for these marriages seem to be different from those occurring in a developing context. In the industrialized countries marriage is mostly initiated by individuals or couples, while in developing world early marriage is associated with poverty, political instability and social pressure. I use such literature here for descriptive purposes mostly or to provide the reader with more information about the phenomenon in general.

1.5 Organization of the thesis

The thesis consists of two parts. The first part sets out the rationale for the study and puts it in the context of the wider theoretical and empirical literature. The second part is devoted to the empirical data, explaining early marriage in Tajikistan.

This opening chapter one introduced and discussed the rationale of the study, plus its questions and aims and defined the topic of early marriage. Chapter 2 explores the theories used to analyse the findings and interpret the extensive information provided in the empirical chapters. This chapter has two main goals: it first of all looks into the literature discussing the main causes of child marriage occurrence in the world; it then focuses on two reasons identified in the literature, culture and family, to take the argument further. The chapter explores the role of patriarchal family types as a centre of early marriage for girls. It considers a range of theories that describe more 'positive' side of patriarchal families, such as family connections and agency of women to argue that families are forced sometimes to make such a decision and girls are not voiceless in those decisions either. This argument is developed further in the following chapter three.

Chapter 3 is a historical analysis of the causes for early marriage. Through reviewing different periods of Central Asian and Tajik history, this chapter shows how decisions made by the families, particularly those related to marriage practices were influenced by the changes each period brought to the region. The chapter demonstrates that such values as dominance and authority were always retained in Central Asia. Irrelevant of whether the family system was attacked aggressively, as during the Soviet Union period, or promoted as in the independence years, it existed at all times. The values however fluctuated from one period to another and certain decisions, such as marriage practices, changed throughout these times, depending on what opportunities existed or were created for women.

The last chapter in this part, chapter four discusses the methodology used to collect data for this study. I firstly, explain why a qualitative method was used and then describe the various data collection methods to ensure the validity and richness of the information. This chapter also describes the fieldwork experience, including researcher positionality.

The second part of the thesis contains the empirical chapters and the findings of this study. This part consists of five chapters, from chapter five to nine. As the overall argument of this study is that early marriage is chosen by Tajik families due to the lack of other opportunities, this part demonstrates the complexity of interrelations among the family members under the current socio-economic and political context. Chapter 5 starts with the discussion of the 'marriage window' or the years when girls enter the marriage market. This chapter is designed as an introduction to the following empirical chapters, as it sets the overall stage for marriage norms and practices observed during the study. It therefore demonstrates the current 'belief' about the right marriage age for girls, discusses the marriage practices and briefly demonstrates the reasons for the marriage age reduction, as stated by the respondents.

The next chapters, chapters six and seven demonstrate the strategies used by the bride's family to prepare girls to be married within the window identified in chapter five, in order to receive the best possible marriage proposal. Chapter 6 starts by focusing on the childhood years of girls, before the age of twelve. This chapter argues that this age period for girls is crucial for their future marriage. At this point, a girl learns the first complex relationship with men and women that prepare her for future married life. Chapter 7 then looks into the adolescents' years, where the basic training of the skills, such as

domestic work and appropriate gender behaviour, gain more significance. I start by looking into the 'demand side' (the grooms' families) for the young, uneducated girls and the pressure on the 'supply side' (the brides' families) to bring up daughters qualifying for a good marriage proposal. At this stage the girls spend more time at home, their social circle is limited to only a few very close friends and their days are spent cleaning and cooking for their families. This chapter demonstrates how skills are learned but it also demonstrates the complex family relationships, such as the role of the brothers and the mother, at this age period.

Chapter 8 provides a different outlook into the previous chapters that demonstrated how girls are being prepared for the future life. Although these three previous chapters show how complex the relationships are among the family members where women seem to be submissive and acceptant of any decisions made for them, chapter 8 looks at this submission from another perspective. In this chapter, I argue that although girls live under a dominant structure where they have to listen to the instructions and undertake *tarbiya* to be crafted as future wives, these girls are not completely powerless. At the same time however nor are they resisting the structure by putting on different 'gendered masks' (Harris, 2004). I argue in chapter eight that girls have an agency 'backed by social structure and cultural norms' (Baxter, 2007, p. 764). This embedded agency provides girls with the tools to ensure their interest is kept in this complex male female dynamics.

The previous empirical chapters demonstrate the social and economic pressure on the families to choose early marriage for their daughters. Chapter nine then as a continuation of this argument focuses on the existing political

context and argues that the decision regarding early girls' marriage in Tajikistan where other opportunities are limited is supported by the current state. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the rhetoric of the existing state sends mixed messages in relation to women's role in the modern Tajikistan. The confusing messages and legislation therefore result in the families own interpretations of the legislations and creative ways of making them work on the ground.

Chapter 10 is the final concluding chapter. This chapter brings together all the arguments the study aimed to convey and concludes the main findings. It also demonstrates the implications of the study and how the findings from the study could assist in continuing and possibly addressing some of the questions raised in this study. The chapter recommends recognizing the issue of early marriage in the country and develop a mechanism for implementing and monitoring of the existing legislation on the minimum marriage age. It recognizes that although creating job opportunities for women seems a difficult and rather impossible task, taking into account the economic growth in the country, the state should nevertheless promote education and create opportunities for young girls to learn other life skills. The phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan, as the chapter concludes, should be targeted through involving girls into the social life and demonstrating other possibilities apart from the marriage.

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

This chapter sets out to introduce the theories that are likely to be relevant when analysing the findings of the empirical study. It draws on three separate bodies of research or theoretical frameworks and consists of two parts.

The first part demonstrates the main causes of early/child marriage in other developing countries identified in the literature. This wider body of work is important for enabling consideration of the causes of early marriage identified in Tajikistan within a comparative context. As this part demonstrates, studies explored various reasons behind early marriage including religion, culture and socio-economic and political context. A significant gap however exists. While describing all possible factors for the families to have their daughters married at an early age, these studies failed to analyse the families per se. Studies have seldom explored the topic from a family perspective that looks into such important questions as: how does child marriage really occur? Where does it start? What motivates families to make such a difficult decision under the pressure of the factors mentioned above? How do girls react to such marriage: do they accept their fate or possibly resist it?

At the same time however, another part of the literature examines family practices in a similar context and links these practices with the overall mistreatment of girls in such societies. The second part of the chapter, hence, reviews the literature analysing Tajik families. As will be demonstrated, it has

been long established that Tajik families function under a patriarchal values based on dominant vs. subordinate positions. Some of the literature discussed in this part concludes that Tajik families are oppressive and destructive towards the womenfolk. Women in these studies have been portrayed as having limited decision-making powers, who are a burden and a danger to the honour of the family and therefore have the lowest status. As a result, when describing the phenomenon of child/early marriage, the link between the practice, the low status of women and the patriarchal type of the families is usually assumed.

Although my findings suggest that Tajik families are patriarchal in many ways, I argue that dominance does not always mean oppression. In this study, I aim to demonstrate that other feelings, shared by parents in other parts of the world, such as love, care, respect, responsibility and affection are also possible in Tajik families. Warm feelings towards children are not considered by many scholars previously analysing Tajik families. As I argue against such interpretation, the final part of the chapter introduces the theories I draw upon when analysing the current study's findings. Suad Joseph's patriarchal connectivity (1993, 1994, and 1999) is a theory that seems relevant for the purpose of this study. Patriarchal connectivity suggests that family members in societies such as Tajikistan are intimately connected to assist each other in shaping Tajik selves, able to live in a context that values collectivism and cherishes family values. As part of this connectivity, family members view each other as an extension of themselves. Moreover, the oppressed girls did not need to resist the dominance that is widely expected. Due to the intimate connections, the girls in this study were able to make self-interested decisions, or express agency. They thus, did not want to break free and there was no need

for that either. Using Saba Mahmood's notion of agency (2001), as an extension of the patriarchal connectivity I demonstrate the ability of the girls to negotiate and act on their own interest. Hence, this chapter's main argument is that although the causes of child, or in the case of Tajikistan, early marriage is common throughout the patriarchal countries, such a difficult family decision is not made only due to the low status of the girls in the family and it is not always a sign of oppression.

2.1 Family decision-making in the marriage process

Before proceeding to the rest of the thesis, it is important to clarify the term 'family's decision' as it is used in this study. While the study analysis the phenomenon of early marriage among girls in Tajikistan, it poses the question as to why families make the decision to have the girls married at an early age. Marriage usually is described as an individual or couple initiated decision, particularly in the western literature (Barber, 2004, Hart, 2007, Plotnick, 2007). My referral to the marriage as a family decision therefore needs clarification.

Family as a unit is the centre of decision making in Tajik families. Although nuclear families consisting of parents and their children exist in Tajikistan, especially in Dushanbe (the capital), the majority of the families still live together as an extended family group sharing one household. The last type of families has always existed in Tajikistan and perhaps became less common during the Soviet period (Kislyakov, 1959). In recent years however, the extended type of families became the norm again, particularly due to economic hardship, where providing each child with a separate house or flat became

impossible for many Tajik households. Nevertheless, even if families live separately from each other, they still belong to a bigger network of families that meet often during national holidays and other celebrations. Such meetings usually occur either at the 'main house', the parental house, or at the eldest brother's place. This collectivistic type of the family, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, has been described as oppressive to Tajik individuals (Harris, 2004, Poliakov, 1992, Kislyakov, 1959). In reality, they function as a source of protection, guidance and care. Such altruism ensures that Tajik individuals belong to a group of families that look out for each other and is mutually responsible throughout the members' lives. From early childhood, people learn to respect and adhere to the opinions of the family elders and to act within the interest of the family. Notions such as 'autonomy', 'individuation' are rather non-existent while bonding, commitment and loyalty to a family are expected as normal (Joseph, 1999). Decisions, no matter how big or small, are therefore made within the family and evolve around its well-being as a unit.

Decisions are usually discussed in a family circle and a final approval is expected from the oldest person, usually a male (families' power distribution is discussed later in this chapter). Younger people although they might participate in the decision-making process do not necessarily have the final word. Although the parent-child relationship has been described as oppressive (Harris 2004), I argue that it is part of a broader set of beliefs that holds the family unit together. In this particular context, as part of the patriarchal connectivity (discussed in section 2.4 of the current chapter), older people are considered wise and believed to know what is best for the younger and less experienced family members. Young people in return ideally do not confront the decisions made by

their parents or grandparents. This expectation is first of all based on the significant role of *hurmat* [respect] in Tajik families and Tajik society in general towards those older in age. Young people however are not silent in most cases, when it comes to deciding their fate. The girls in this study for example, did not obediently accept the arranged marriage if they did not agree with it¹⁰.

Marriage nevertheless, was arranged for the majority of the girls in this study. Couple initiated marriages that are associated with modernization and are proposed to be more advantageous for women in male dominated cultures, because they are consistent with the norm of individualism and gender equality (Hart, 2007) were promoted strongly in Soviet Tajikistan. Marriage in Tajikistan, however, is not about the couple or separate individuals. Family initiated marriages are traditionally arranged with the purpose of strengthening family unit, as demonstrated by the respondents of this study. Through this arrangement, the patriarchal connectivity circle thus increases where responsibility both emotional and economic are extended to include the newly related family. Because marriage plays such a significant role, as it determines the next relation, it is therefore in the interest of the family to be engaged in the process, making marriage a family matter. I was assured many times during data collection in the field, that fathers make a final decision in both choosing a girl in the groom's family and in approving a marriage from the girls' side. In reality however, this study uncovered the extensive level of women's involvement in the process of marriage arranging¹¹.

¹⁰ See empirical chapters from five to nine, but for more detailed description see chapter 8.

¹¹ See chapter 7 below for details

Thus, as part of the patriarchal connectivity, where family interest is of more importance than that of an individual and where family members are mutually responsible for each other, decisions are made collectively in Tajik families. When I refer to the girls' marriage in this thesis as families' decision, I thus imply that marriage is arranged for the girls in regards to when and whom they would marry. While it does not mean the girls are voiceless, families act in the perceived interest of the girl and in the interest of the whole family to ensure she is married to the family, they chose.

2.2 Causes of child marriage

Various factors are identified as influencing the age of first marriage for girls in developing countries. According to the literature, families tend to have their daughters married at a very early age due to cultural expectations but also socio-economic and political pressure. The causes identified in the literature are consistent with the findings of this study, as the empirical chapters will demonstrate. Similarly, as I will describe in the empirical chapters, case studies from the fieldwork demonstrate that girls in Tajikistan are married earlier today because their role as mothers and wives has been strengthened in recent years. This role is then undertaken as a result of the limited socio-economic opportunities, such as devaluation of the formal education and unavailability of jobs¹².

¹² See chapters 5 to 9

2.2.1 Religion, culture and tradition

According to the literature, one of the prime reasons for early marriage is religion, culture and tradition. The literature describes the culture and tradition associated with low women's status as one of the characteristics of patriarchal communities. Due to this association, child marriage is listed among the so-called 'traditional harmful practices' (UNICEF, 2005), along with other gender related issues, such as honour killing and female genital mutilation.

Subordinate gender status, widespread among patriarchal communities and Muslims, is reported as the main reason for child marriage in many parts of the world (Ertem and Kocturk, 2008). Many communities prioritize sexual purity of the girls as it is associated with family honour (Faqir, 2001). Marriage in these cases serves to control the sexuality of women and to prevent any romantic love affairs that would stain the family's reputation (Ertem and Kocturk, 2008, Gangoli and McCarry, 2009). In one study of rural Bangladesh, for example, parents arranged their daughters' marriage earlier to protect them from gossip about sexual involvement (Schuler et al., 2006). Moreover, girls get married as children to serve the interest of the whole community or caste. In parts of India for example, young girls are married off to resolve any disputes among the caste or to pay debts (Chowdhry, 1997).

Tradition as closely tied with religion is often used as an explanation for a particular family practice (Wayachut, 1993). The assumption is that girls born in Muslim families are more likely to marry at a much younger age (Wayachut, 1993). Statistics from a study in the UK, for example, demonstrate that early age of marriage depends on religion, rather than nation or ethnicity, where

Muslims between the ages of 16-24 are more likely to be married than other ethnic minorities of the same age (Gangoli and McCarry, 2009). Similarly in Thailand, where age of marriage among Muslims and Buddhists is compared, it is found that regions with predominantly Islamic beliefs married off girls at a much younger age (Wayachut, 1993). Another interesting study demonstrates that in Britain, the 'britishness' of South Asian Muslim community is questioned due to their practice of arranged and forced marriages as oppressive towards women (Enright, 2009). Enright shows that the politics of 'British belonging' targets the minority culture of South Asian Muslims for its marriage practices, which 'represent the rejection of shared 'British' values in favour of cultural ideals' (p. 341.). Religion however is interpreted differently by each society and it is usually socially and historically constructed. To say therefore that religion is the main reason for one or another practice is rather a one-sided argument, which could result in overlooking the broader context where the religious values have been developed.

Thus, Shehada (2008) argues that blaming Islamic family law for child marriage is not a solution. She describes how families use Islamic law as justification when in reality they themselves determine at what age their daughters can get married depending on the overall socio-economic and political factors. Bahramtash and Kazemipour (2006) findings point out similarities in their study of marriage age in Iran. In an important study, they argue against the general hypothesis that religious revivalism is negative towards the women. According to them in Iran, the less modernized/urbanized and poverty driven rural areas are more likely to practice child marriages than

urban areas with education and employment opportunities while the whole country functions under one Islamic law.

The nature of the economic transaction during the marriage of a girl, where a groom's family pays bride price to the bride's family is another traditional determinant of child marriage identified in the literature. While in some communities, such as Nigeria, the bride price results in increasing the age of marriage for girls, because of the inability of the young men to pay the high price expected by the young women and their families, in other places it pushes the age of marriage down (Masquelier, 2005). Chowdhary and Deeba (2004), using the 'profit making motive' to explain the phenomenon of child marriage in rural Bangladesh, found out that families profit from marrying off their daughters at an early age. Similarly, in other communities families not only economically free themselves from such a burden as a young girl, but it is also a way to improve their financial situation through receiving *mahr*, the bride price (Sah, 2008). For this particular reason of economic transaction, child marriage is associated with child prostitution. In the case of Middle East and North Africa Mikhail (2002) argues that, although child prostitution is limited in these countries, child marriage which is common has the same character as it involves paying the third party, in this case the parents of the young girls.

However, culture and tradition cannot be the only explanation to the reasons behind child marriage practices. While the majority of the literature points to tradition and culture as a reason for child marriage, generalization should be avoided. Bunting (2005) therefore, suggests a different approach. In contrast to many scholars Bunting, using sociology of childhood theory, argues that childhood is not a fixed notion and varies through history and culture. For her,

the universal understanding of children as those under the age of 18 does not seem relevant to all the cultures. She recommends taking into consideration cultural specificity and argues against the approach that child marriage is a violation of human rights, suggesting that 'a strategy based on a uniform marriageable age as suggested by CEDAW (1994) and a narrow rights-based analysis missed the complexity of both marriage *and* age' (Bunting, 2005, p.18). Bunting proposes analysing and addressing socio-economic conditions under which women live before developing a culturally appropriate strategy. Similarly, South Asian communities in North England do not perceive themselves as children at the time of their marriage which is under the age of 16 (Gangoli and McCarry, 2009). As I demonstrate in chapter one and chapter five, the same was relevant to Tajikistan, where girls, getting married before the universally or legally accepted age of 18, were not classified as children.

It is important to understand family practices, such as child marriage, through religious, cultural and traditional beliefs. However, these three factors, often identified as one of the key reasons behind the marriage of the girls below the age of 18 do not represent the whole picture. Surely, when families feel pressured, they choose different ways to improve their situation. However, it is important to remember that religion, culture and tradition are prone to changing through times and spaces. It is therefore crucial to analyse other factors or the broader context of the communities where the families are forced to make such a decision.

2.2.2 Socio-economic factors. Poverty, employment and education.

The second set of factors relate to economic issues. Socio-economic development, such as modernization, urbanization and globalization is associated with later age of marriage, in the literature. It is thus argued that in urban places prone to external influences (IPPF, 2007), where education and employment are available, individualization takes the place of the collectivism and therefore increases the age of first marriage. For example, Garenne's review (2004) of demographic data on 32 sub-Saharan African countries indicates that age of marriage depends on modernization and thus throughout the five years that he compared, the age of marriage remained low in the rural areas while in it had increased in the urban areas. Closer to Tajikistan, as noted above, in Iran, girls living in the urban areas married later in comparison to the girls in rural areas (Tremayne, 2006).

Moreover, childhood socio-economic context, such as the availability of schooling, employment and other opportunities influences children's perception of marriage (Barber, 2004, Yabiku, 2006). Nobles and Bутtenheim (2008) use a cost-benefit marriage model to demonstrate that in Indonesia both men and women are able to postpone their marriage by calculating the benefits of marriage over the cost of wedding ceremony.

Socio-economic development, particularly, urbanization, modernization and globalization are associated with school enrolment and employment opportunities that in turn empower women and thus increase the age of marriage in developing countries (Singh and Samara, 1996). These factors however seem controversial and provoke a debate among the scholars. Those supporting modernization and globalization believe in a positive association between schooling and employment on the age of marriage, while others

suggest these two empowering tools for women might not necessarily work in certain contexts. I will now analyse each of the above-mentioned determinants separately.

Poverty

Poverty is identified as one of the major triggers for early marriage in the developing world (Nasrin and Rahman, 2012, UNICEF, 2001). In the global assessment of child marriage levels, UNICEF (2005) found out that in all countries the phenomenon of child marriage is most widespread among the poorest 20 percent of the population. Marrying off a girl as young as possible is a survival strategy of the families in need according to many scholars (Nasrin and Rahman, 2012, Sah, 2008, UNICEF, 2001). In West Africa, economic hardship becomes a reason for increased practice of child marriage even among the groups that normally do not have this practice (UNICEF, 2001). Dahal et al., (1993) observes in Nepal that in the cases when families have greater landholdings, marriage of the young girls is delayed. The Health Survey in Nepal cited in (Sah, 2008), reports that half of the women from the lower economic households are married by the age of 15-19, compared to only one fifth of the women from the better off economic households of the same age.

In the case of Bangladesh, poor families, although aware of the consequences of early marriage such as the risks of early childbearing, choose earlier marriage for their daughters as a result of economic pressure, hoping their daughters would have better lives in their in-laws families (Schuler et al., 2006). The economic condition in the parental house seems unfair towards girls. Thus, immediately after birth, girls are described as a burden to the

parental household, whereas boys are regarded as an asset (Chowdhury and Deeba, 2004). Marrying off the girls earlier therefore serves to free the household from one additional mouth to feed (UNICEF, 2001). Thus in Sub-Saharan Africa the bride's family hopes to receive a single cattle from the groom's family as the bride price for their daughter (Bart, 1994). Similarly families in five poor villages in Egypt married off the young girls to much older men from oil-rich Middle Eastern countries (UNICEF, 2001). A study from Iraq indicates a rise in early marriage as a result of extreme poverty due to post-Gulf War sanctions (UNICEF, 2001).

Employment

However, according to some studies, the belief that a son is a support for the parents in future modifies with globalization and availability of employment. Thus, in Bangladesh the patriarchal system devalues as a result of men not being able to provide and support their families (Ahmed and Bould, 2004). Women's ability to work, gives them more authority and decision making power, giving them an opportunity to leave their husbands without being driven into poverty (Ahmed and Bould, 2004). Brother-sister roles change where the girls, due to employment opportunities, become 'male daughters' (p.3) and replace their brothers in supporting their aging parents (Porter, 2004, p. 3). Moreover, Porter (2004) reports that due to economic opportunities, the father-daughter relationship in Tanzania becomes less gender-restrictive and the young females undertake many responsibilities and privileges reserved for sons.

A study in Indonesia demonstrates that economic opportunities are important in shaping individual's choice to enter the marriage (Nobles and Buttenheim, 2008). Economic growth is therefore an alternative to marriage. In Egypt, for example, although the age of marriage increased due to wage work, marriage did not lose its value (Amin and Al-Bassusi, 2004). In contrast, the rising standards of living becomes the main reason for the young women to undertake jobs. The Egyptian young women work to prepare for their marriage and to stock more material goods which they could bring to their marriage (Amin and Al-Bassusi, 2004). Excessive modernity however, plays against the women in Cote d'Ivoire. Leblanc (2007) describes how women with western education in Cote d'Ivoire became economically independent but are not considered as Muslim women as they have failed to perform the transition into marriage as expected. In that study, only through adopting religious practice, were the young women able to negotiate their return to marriage market.

Education

The relationship between education and age of marriage is well established by many studies (LeBlanc, 2007, Sah, 2008, UNICEF, 2001, 2005). Research indicates that girls with at least secondary education and at least minor participation in the labour force are likely to get married later (Singh and Samara, 1996). At the same time gender disparity in education is also a result of child marriage among girls in West Africa (Tuwora and Sossoub, 2008). An increase in the age of marriage due to education enrolment is noted in Indonesia, where the author argues that the majority of women are employed

due to education enrolment while a generation ago women were kept out of work to restrict their movement before the marriage (Jones, 2001). Similarly, in Malawi, age of first marriage among a younger cohort of educated women is higher which in turn decreased fertility rates (Manda and Meyer, 2005)

In addition, better educated older women, such as mothers and mothers-in-law influence the age of marriage and childbearing among younger girls. Educated mothers are more likely to advocate for education for their daughters and are able to use convincing arguments to persuade their husbands against early marriage (Bates et al., 2007). Moreover, the higher the father's education the more likely he is to postpone his daughter's marriage. Those educated in secondary or higher education are 35% more likely to have their daughters married at a later age in comparison to those with only primary education (Nasrin and Rahman, 2012).

Nevertheless, a number of studies indicate that women's empowerment and modernization do not necessarily change the tradition and women's own perception towards marriage value. Such an argument is particularly visible in Malhotra's several studies in Indonesia (Malhotra, 1997) and Sri-Lanka (Malhotra and Tsui, 1996) where along with other scholars, she argues that modern social contexts should not be expected to change women's overall situation. According to her it is important to take into account such factors as, social context of the country and its historical background and ethical and class differences (Malhotra and Tsui, 1996). In a joint study with Mather (Malhotra and Mather, 1997), they argue that even if the women could have a power to

make decisions, the level of decision making is limited. At the same time, a modern social context for her is not associated with more egalitarian gender roles and marriage. In her study in Java, she found out that education for urban women not only does not mean more independence from their families, but even reinforces such western ideas as conjugal marriage and romance strengthening the idea of marriage and thus encouraging women to prioritize marriage over employment (Malhotra, 1997). Malhotra and Tsui (1996) also explore nuclear family norms associated with modern ideas in explaining the timing of marriage in Sri Lanka – a country with universal level of primary education and later age of marriage – but do not find the modernization in the family values. They found that the two factors, high level of education and high age of marriage do not change families' preference for joint family living and parental role in their children's marriage choices.

Similarly, Tremayne (2006) argues against the positive association between availability of education and age of first marriage for girls. Her study in Iran covering an area with high literacy rate among women reveals that in three generation marriage has not lost its social significance. She argues that unless education is followed by fundamental change in the lives of girls, it adds little value to the quality of their lives and does not free them from the social bonds (Tremayne, 2006).

Scholarly opinion in regards to socio-economic opportunities and women's empowerment through education and employment seems to be in conflict. While scholars agree that poverty, lack of education and employment results in earlier age of marriage, the availability of such opportunities as education and employment does not always change family practices. Nevertheless, while it is

important to keep in mind the social context of the country, as Malhotra and Tsui (1996) suggest, modernization could positively influence the age of marriage for women. It should, however, be followed by other changes, such as promoting the women's role in society, providing social support, such as childcare and making available jobs with good benefits, modernization could possibly positively influence family practices. Thus, if a girl contributes financially to the family and if she is able to bring up well-educated children with good chances for the future, families' decisions and social expectations towards girls could change.

2.2.3 The influence of the legal and political context

The legal and political context is yet another factor that affects marriage decisions. A minimum legal marriage age is set in many countries prone to child marriages. Nevertheless, the use of law in regulating child marriages is not sufficient as UNICEF (2001) report demonstrated. According to this report, there is an inconsistency between the legal age of marriage and the actual age of marriage in a number of countries. Laws regulating the marriage are not applied and the very few families are prosecuted when marrying off their daughters at much earlier age (UNICEF, 2001). As Shehada (2008) argues, the influence of other factors, such as urbanization, education and employment opportunities is more significant than formal law forbidding the practice of early marriage.

While countries fail to implement the legislation, the evidence suggests that other contexts associated with the political situation in the countries also influences marriage patterns. Instability and insecurity, particularly at times of

war and crisis influence the overall demography of a country, including marriage preferences. In Rwanda, during the genocide in 1994, a high number of males were killed which resulted in shortage of men in the country and lead to later marriage for women (Jayaraman et al., 2009). In addition, those women subject to sexual violence during the conflict struggled to find a marriage partner (Jayaraman et al., 2009). In Western Mali, Sara Randall (2005) argues that persistent marriage patterns are a response to conflict. Randall shows how the population of western Mali, maintained their traditional marriage behaviour throughout the conflict as reinforcement of identity that separated them from the 'others'. Another interesting study in Sierra Leone, analyses sexual violence against women as 'weapon of war' from the point of view of one of the armed groups (Marks, 2013). The study illustrates how this particular armed group introduce marriage as an 'antidote' to rape (p. 74). However, as it is only the commanders who are allowed to take one or more wife, marriage is a demonstration of status for the men. For women, even though enforced at times, marriage becomes a protection from sexual violence of other men and provision of financial support at the difficult time (Marks, 2013).

A study in Palestine explores how the marriage arrangement and wedding celebrations changed under the warlike conditions during the two intifadas, as an uprising against the Israeli colonial rules (Johnson et al., 2009). The results reveal two main differences in marriage patterns. According to Johnson et al. (2009) political instability influences the traditional values of the people when they only appeared, but after a while when families realise the continuity of such conflicts, they return to their previous practices. Thus, while during the first intifada, political engagement was a major consideration when

choosing a marriage partner, this engagement moved from a positive to a negative qualification in the second intifada. During the first uprisings therefore, the community supported and celebrated the 'wanted' men chased by Israeli forces. In the second uprisings, however, girls and their families' preferences changed, as they wanted security for their daughters. Therefore, if a young man wanted to get married he had to change his political involvement in the conflict. At the same time, marriage celebrations changed throughout the two periods. If during the first period, the culture of austerity and mourning made the celebration simple and inexpensive, during the second period, the material side of marriage became important again. This study is a clear demonstration of how marriage patterns fluctuate under political instability. While marriage is still important, families' choices on marriage partner and marriage celebration change depending on the overall mood shared by the community under the political chaos. The broader context therefore influences families' decisions overall, but also towards marriage practices and marriage age for girls.

This section has discussed the causes of child marriage in countries similar to the context of Tajikistan. As is clear from this section, culture/tradition, socio-economic and political factors can influence the decision of the families in regards to the age of marriage. Although described as a cultural and traditional practice, the age of marriage for women is also influenced by external factors, such as availability or lack of socio-economic opportunities and political instability. Each of these factors, even though important, explains the phenomenon only partially. While it is crucial to understand the broader context when analysing marriage of girls at a young age and to have a culturally specific

rather than universal approach, it is also important to look into how these factors work in practice. The current literature thus captures the contextual factors effectively but does not examine the family itself, where such decisions are made. The next section will therefore analyse the literature describing traditional, patriarchal families that are prone to child marriage practices and will analyse the complexity of the interpersonal relationships that shape such practices.

2.3 Family dynamics

In section 2.2 above, the focus was on macro or structural influences on child marriage. It is now important to focus more specifically on the families where such marriage takes place. Although it is clear that many external contextual factors affect families to push the age of marriage for the girls down, the early marriage literature does not go behind these determinants to explore the families where the marriages occur. What is missing therefore is a profile of a typical family or, the family dynamics when deciding on the age of the marriage for girls. What feelings do the family members have when they make such a difficult decision? What is the driving force behind these determinants? To the best of my knowledge, the current literature on child marriage does not address these questions.

The family practices and relationships are however, explored by a different set of literature. In this part of the chapter, I would like to review such literature in the context of Tajikistan. Studies examining Tajik families, although do not address child marriage, describe family practices in general and in

relation to Tajik women. As demonstrated below, Tajik families are portrayed as based on patriarchal values, where women have the lowest status (Poliakov 1992, Harris 2004). Early marriage therefore, even though not analysed separately, is associated with the dominant and subordinate status of the family members (Andreev, 1953, Kislyakov, 1959, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Vasileva, 1989). This section will analyse these studies in more details.

2.3.1 Tajik family structure and the notion of patriarchy

Tajik families became the focus of discussion in the early years of the Soviet Union. Studies were predominantly conducted by the Russians at this period. The ethnocentric attitude of the Russian scholars is therefore apparent in the literature. Conducted during the Soviet period, these studies seem to be influenced by the overall Soviet ideology towards separate cultures and by the 'women's question' specifically. Thus to be in line with the general atmosphere prevailing at that period, the literature also demonstrates the life-style of the Central Asian people as 'backward' that needed to be improved to the Russian standards. Moreover, almost all of the analysis are concluded by the success of the Soviet state to 'emancipate' the Eastern women from the feudal-patriarchal despotism of their families. It is thus difficult to estimate the accuracy of these accounts.

Portrayed as 'feudal-patriarchal' before the October Revolution, families in Tajikistan, according to the literature, were based on Muslim rituals and were regulated by Sharia (a moral code and religious law). The oldest male as a patriarch was portrayed as having an absolute authority in the families, with all

the family possession in his hands and made all of the domestic decisions (Andreev, 1953, Kislyakov, 1959, Masharipova, 1990, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Pal'vanova, 1982, Shukurova, 1970, Tiurin, 1962, Vasileva, 1989). The patriarch expected complete subordination from all the members of the family. As a patriarch, he did not do much himself but gave orders to others and distributed duties among the family members (Masharipova, 1990, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Pal'vanova, 1982). Although the younger generation both men and women were under his subordination, women are described as particularly controlled.

Sharia law legalised the dominance of men over women. Women were portrayed as 'humiliated and powerless' (Kislyakov, 1959 p.47). Andreev (1925) however, notes that women 'surprisingly hold less humiliating status than expected...she can spend the money she earned as she wishes...and she can even sometimes share her money with her husband.' (p.167). Nevertheless, although Kislyakov (1959) also explores the significant role of the women in productive labour, he argues that women were still treated with a 'despotic attitude' (p.42). A man had the right to marry a girl of a young age, physically assault his wife, murder her in case of adultery, practice polygamy and easily divorce his wife. A father similarly, perceived his daughter as a burden and rushed her marriage to usually the first person who offered a high bride price. According to Poliakov (1992), families used their daughters practically as slaves, because they are 'nurturing a worker for someone else's family' (p.59), who has to be used as much as possible until she is married. Rich families completely secluded their womenfolk, while poor families forced women to work hard both within the families (bringing up children, cooking and cleaning) and

outside (whether working on the lands or looking after livestock) (Andreev, 1953, Vasileva, 1989). Men in comparison, spent time with their friends rode their horses to fill out their free time or drank tea in teahouses (Vasileva, 1989).

In recent years, Tajik families have received extensive attention in the literature, particularly from western scholars. Generally families in Tajikistan are described as significant part of individuals' identity, where people see themselves as an extension of the collective group (Harris, 2004, Tett, 1996). Similar to other collective cultures, as a member of such unit, individuals first identify themselves with a particular family and then with their direct and extended families or *avlod*. *Avlod* is an 'extended patriarchal family that serves as an informal mutual support structure' (p. 77), where members of the family keep in close contact both direct and extended families as a unit of economic, ideological and cultural activities (Nourzhanov and Bleuer, 2013). Families I met during the fieldwork, not only preferred to live in extended families but also participated in each other's lives very actively. This was particularly evident during the celebrations. Aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters with their families would stay for weeks with the family having a wedding. Mostly such visits were to assist the family: from a simple advice to organizing the wedding and/or providing financial support.

This collectivism however is linked with patriarchal type of the families and can be viewed as a negative force against those in a subordinate position in Tajikistan (Kislyakov, 1959). Harris (2004) views collectivism as a source of 'apparently cruel behaviour' in Tajik society (p.174). Contemporary Tajik

families are thus, similar to the Soviet literature, described by Harris (2004) as patriarchal and dominant. The oldest man as a patriarch represents his family in the community and is responsible for the behaviour of his dependents, both men and women (Harris, 2004). The head of the family therefore, although seemingly privileged, is vulnerable because his status as a patriarch is linked with behaviour of those subordinated to him. Consequently, his role is to ensure that family members, both men and women act according to their gender. As a result, Tajik men are raised to demonstrate power, control and authority and often use violence to obtain obedience, discipline and power in the family (see also Haarr, 2007).

The dominant-subordinate power distribution in Tajik families is particularly noted in the relationship among parents and children. The parent-children interrelation is demonstrated by Harris (2004) as based solely on dependence, dominance and control. In her book 'Control and subversion' (2004) Harris argues that children are kept economically and socially dependent on their parents because a dependent child is easier to control. She goes further stating that when analysing Tajikistan it is important to consider 'how the social construction of young people as subordinate to their parents and as lacking the ability to make rational decisions regarding their own lives has led to the oppression of this group by adults of both sexes' (page 7). Harris suggests that in the relations of parents and children in Tajikistan, emotional relationship does not exist after a child reaches the age of 12. She believes 'emphasis will be on control rather than love' in this relationship (p.98). Interestingly, in analysing this relationship Harris does not mention the role of *hurmat* [respect], which has a very significant meaning in a Tajik culture. 'Total obedience' (p. 13),

which is expected from the children and which seems to puzzle Harris, is therefore no more than a demonstration of *hurmat*. Openly speaking up against parents or any other adult is perceived as being disrespectful and is linked with morality of individuals. The idioms such as *shumo*¹³ [you] or *aka* [elder brother], *apa* [elder sister], does not only represent the ‘intergenerational control’ (Harris, 2004) but also is a demonstration of *hurmat*. Moreover, the parent-child relationship is also based around *tarbiya* [moral upbringing]¹⁴, another significant concept in a Tajik society missing from Harris’s work. As I demonstrate throughout the empirical chapters, children were constantly under *tarbiya* [moral upbringing] of those who were older. *Hurmat* and *tarbiya* are in fact part of demonstrating affection and responsibility in Tajik families where warm feelings exist but are not displayed openly (see chapter five on this).

The parent-child relationship, however, has been mentioned earlier in the Tajik context as sacred (Roche, 2010, p. 132) and based on love and affection (Stephan, 2009). Roche (2010) and Stephan (2009) link the sacredness of the relationship with a religious notion where parents have certain duties towards their children, which is later on shared by the children. This last interpretation seems more consistent with the empirical data of the current study. I particularly argue for the notion of the love and affection [*mehru muhabbat*] as possible in dominant Tajik families in contrast to Harris (2004).

Love and affection are displayed through constant responsibility towards family members no matter if close or distant. Parents have a duty to bring up

¹³ Tajiks use the idiom *you* in two different situations. *Shumo* is generally a plural form of *you*, but it is also used to represent respect towards an older person, a person holding a higher position or a stranger.

¹⁴ Also noted by Roche (2010) and Stephan (2009)

their children as fully potential Tajik men and women and children are responsible for looking after their aged parents later¹⁵. In this study, apart from parents, other family members, such as grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins constantly participated in each other's lives, gave advice where necessary, socialized the youngsters, punished those who failed to learn, or built a closer connection, respect and trust through demonstrating docility. Each person both men and women belonged to a family where they were crafted as competent future Tajik men and women. Although the role of the older family members, such as parents and grandparents or uncles and aunts was significant in socializing the youngsters, brothers and sisters role was not meaningless either. As the later chapters will demonstrate, siblings formed their selfhood in relationship to their sisters or brothers. Girls learned not only how to be a submissive and obedient daughter and sister, but how to also benefit from age and gender hierarchy.

2.3.2 Honour and shame

Patriarchy is linked with honour and shame ideology. It is due to this ideology that usually is held responsible for women's maltreatment. It is thus an integral part of the overall discussion around females' status in 'oppressive' families. A similar association is also found in the literature analysing Tajik families both in Russian and western literature. It is therefore important to focus on this notion separately here. Additionally, I mention honour and shame

¹⁵ Mutual responsibility among Tajik families has been mentioned by previous scholars. See Roche (2010) and Stephan (2009)

throughout the empirical chapters. Describing this ideology at this stage would thus help in better understanding of the empirical chapters.

The literature on honour and shame is extensive (Abu-Lughod, 1999, Al-Khayyat, 1990, Baxter, 2007, Haarr, 2010, Harris, 2004, Kandiyoti, 1988, Killoran, 1998, Poliakov, 1992, VerEecke, 1993, Werner, 2009). Females sexuality is significant to the honour of the family in Tajikistan and in similar cultural contexts (Al-Khayyat, 1990, Harris, 2004, Mincses, 1980). In other words, while men are associated with the honour of the family and are thus responsible for keeping it, the women are the ones to endanger the honour and are therefore associated with shame (Al-Khayyat, 1990).

In Tajikistan, Harris (2004) describes the honour and shame notion in her book very precisely. As mentioned earlier, both boys and girls are described by Harris (2004) as under constant control of the older family members to ensure they perform their gendered roles. Young men are thus expected to be strong, powerful and dominant to grow into a future patriarch (Haarr, 2007, Harris, 2004). Young women should be obedient and most importantly virgin. As a result, women's behaviour in Tajikistan is controlled at all times to avoid any wrongdoing that could question the girls' virginity (Harris, 2004, p. 68). The girls are generally described as oppressed due to their association with shame. For Harris the Tajik girls' status appears as the 'lowest' in the families (p.103). She mentions that the girls' marriage is arranged at an early age because there is a bigger responsibility associated with bringing up girls for Tajik parents (p.99). Such a low status is reported as a reason for their physical abuse as they are brought up to believe punishment by their husbands and mothers-in-law is deserved (Haarr, 2007). Similarly, Bastug and Hortacsu (2000) argue that girls

in Turkmenistan are devalued as daughters and sisters and are only socially valued as in marrying wives due to the economic transaction during the wedding. Women are oppressed mostly by men. Harris (2004) thus argues that such characteristics, as 'responsibility, kindness, caring and tenderness are non-existent in the definition of masculine gender identity' (p. 91).

While honour and shame and their association with men and women could be interpreted as described by Harris (2004), another interpretation also exists. Thus, according to Baxter (2007), women in honour and shame ideology are not oppressed as popularly believed, but in fact privileged. Men are to protect and care for the women, as their wrongdoing can be viewed as men's failure. In contrast to Harris (2004) therefore, Baxter (2007) demonstrates love, care and involvement of the men in women's lives in Palestine. Women at the same enjoy their status by using their brothers' love to fulfil their own ambitions. I also believe that women's position as overly oppressed and men's position as extremely advantaged is a rather simplistic claim. In reality, the relationship among men and women, brothers and sister, daughters and fathers is more complicated. As I hope to demonstrate in this study, the honour and shame ideology is necessary in the interactions between brothers and sisters. It is not always a tool to oppress the girls neither it is a tool to feel subordinate. It is a method of constantly shaping each other's identity, preparing each other as the 'real' Tajik person through commands, negotiation and ways of expressing one's interests and ambitions.

Virginity, however, is important. Although I did not meet families during the fieldwork who paid significant attention to demonstrating power distribution in the family and playing the roles of dominant and subordinate for public only

(Harris 2004), public opinion was important. Displaying virginity was as a result, not to demonstrate that the girl is under someone's dominance and therefore is virgin, but to avoid public negative judgement which could ruin the girl's future.

The young girls I met during my fieldwork in Tajikistan agreed it was not only important to be chaste, but also demonstrate virginity by behaving appropriately. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2002) demonstrates: 'The hymen becomes displaced from its biological vessel, the vagina, onto the body as a whole, "hymenizing" it and producing it as a body called female....but then it is displaced again onto the social space where the female body is allowed to move/be, encircling it as a social hymen that delimits its borders' (p.579). Acting as a virgin, was important for Tajik girls in this study, whether they considered themselves modern or traditional. The modern type of girls, for example, who smoke cigarettes, wore jeans and regularly went dancing to the local clubs in Dushanbe, were conscious of their behaviour. When they smoked, they hid in the toilets, when they wanted a beer they requested a male friend to purchase it for them as they realised it was not appropriate for a Tajik girl to smoke or drink an alcohol. At the same time, the traditional type of girls met mostly in the villages, quit school because the possibility of spreading rumour questioning their virginity was less likely when they were at home. Thus, being a virgin and displaying it was important not only for the family honour but also for the girls if they want to be perceived as a traditional Tajik woman, who wanted to get married one day.

In a similar cultural context, the notion of honour and shame is more dramatic than for the women in Tajikistan. In Palestine, for example, the prevalence of honour crimes is a widespread phenomenon (Shalhoub-

Kevorkian, 2002). While such measures have not been reported in Tajik families, physical abuse is noted by Haarr (2007). According to her young girls 'learn they must tolerate abuse through personal experience...' (p.248) before they enter marriage at the hands of their fathers and brothers and even mothers (Haarr, 2007). I agree that domestic violence is a widespread practice in the country and recognize therefore its severity. I do not focus on domestic violence in this thesis however, because although it existed in the families, in the context of this study, I view it as corporal punishment¹⁶. I do not use a different term to minimize its significance but simply demonstrate how Tajik families, interviewed for this study, explained and used it. Corporal punishment in the case of daughters being hit by their family members might be viewed correctly as domestic violence in the western culture, but in a Tajik family where the girl was still under the responsibility of her parents until she got married, such practice was common for another reason. Corporal punishment in the context of Tajikistan was to discipline or educate youngsters, while in the western context 'domestic violence' is conceptualised as about power or imposing control over those who are vulnerable. Nazokat for example, whose case I present in chapter 6, and other parents similar to her, agreed that corporal punishment was part of the children's *tarbiya* [moral upbringing] I will return to the question of corporal punishment later in empirical chapters.

Early marriage is associated with the patriarchal structure of the families in countries similar to Tajikistan. As this part of the chapter demonstrated,

¹⁶ See Haarr (2007), (2010) for more information on domestic violence in Tajikistan.

families in Tajikistan are mostly portrayed as authoritarian, dominant and hierarchal. The girls are reported to have the lowest status, where decisions are made for them at every level of their lives to either control their behaviour or demonstrate the power relationship in the families. As their sexuality is significant for the honour of the whole family, the girls suffer from violence, seclusion and lack of mobility. The devaluation of the girls limits their existence as sisters and daughters to only becoming a wife and a mother one day. Families only gain from arranging a girl's marriage at an early age, as it not only reduces the number of people to provide for but also brings material wealth through bride price. I argue against such an interpretation in the empirical chapters and want to point out that families' practices are not always against the wellbeing of their daughters. Tajik families in this study were able to not only be dominant and care about their status in the community, but they were also capable of affectionate feelings towards their daughters. Marriage, as I argue, was not always a way to reduce the number of mouths to feed, but also a way of protection and ensuring girls did not miss the only available future security in a society that was unable to provide other sources.

2.4 Theoretical framework

Patriarchal connectivity

We saw from earlier analysis that Tajk families are identified as patriarchal and traditional, based on dominant and subordinate power distribution. Women, according to many studies demonstrated above are

oppressed on every level. Although studies did not focus on early marriage in particular, such a practice is demonstrated as normal within patriarchal Tajik values. The dominance at the same time is described as due to collectivist type of families in Tajikistan (Kislyakov 1959, Harris 2004). Several other studies, predominantly those by liberal feminists, similarly assume that western individualistic approach positively shapes people and develops them into individuals who are able to progress with their lives in comparison to non-western collective type of families that oppress children, particularly women all their lives (Nussbaum, 1999, Nussbaum, 2000, Okin, 1998). As I argue against such an interpretation, I draw on Suad Joseph's work on patriarchal connectivity (1993, 1994, 1999) to analyse this study's findings.

Suad Joseph (1999) argues against the individuated self, which according to Joseph is 'assumed to be the hallmark of maturity' (1999, p.1) in the western literature. She focuses on relationality, a selfhood construction in relationship to other members of the family, and how it has been seen as dysfunctional in the work of the scholars who viewed the individualized construct of self as the only possible one. She looks into psychological theories where relationality has been seen as an obstacle for maturity and therefore individualization. These theories describe relationality therefore as destructive of agency. Joseph suggests a different approach where relationality is not pathologized and takes into account cultural specificities, race, class, religion, ethnicity and power. She argues that relational selving, that is constructing oneself in relationship to significant others, does not have to be dysfunctional. According to her:

'In societies in which the family or community is as or more valued than the person, in which persons achieve meaning in the context of family or community, and in which survival depends upon integration into family or community, such relationality may support the production of what is locally recognized as a healthy, responsible and mature person'. (p.9)

To demonstrate the construction of self in relations to others in patriarchal societies, Joseph uses the term 'patriarchal connectivity'. Connectivity is explained by her as a relationship where 'a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others' (p. 12). Connectivity strengthens family solidarity necessary for social, economic and political survival, where people are responsibility for and towards significant others and see themselves as an extension of others or in connection to family members. She notes that, this connectivity helps to produce 'healthy, responsible and mature individuals' that are able to function in societies where family is valued more than a single person. Such connectivity however, according to Joseph, does not create gender and age specific authority related to patriarchy. As a separate notion, connectivity coupled with patriarchy 'have helped produce selves trained in the psychodynamics of domination, knowing how to control and be controlled' (p.13). Thus, the patriarch views his wife, sisters, younger siblings and children as part of him and he therefore may speak for them and make decisions for them.

Although Suad Joseph's work (1993, 1994, 1999) is focused on Arab families and her patriarchal connectivity is culturally specific, she believes it might have relevance in other societies. When analysing dynamics of Tajik families in this study I came upon relationships among siblings, parents and

children where one can clearly see how the concept of patriarchal connectivity could be applied. Although community control might be a way of keeping social order in Tajikistan (Harris, 2004), families dynamics, such as dominance and compliance, are not simply to live up to the community control and therefore are not for demonstration purposes only. It is important to be aware of community control, which as I will demonstrate later plays a significant part in the young girls' future and their marriage opportunities. Nevertheless, apart from this control, families' dynamics were also to strategize their approach in securing girls' future through preparing them to be fully socialised Tajik women. From what I saw during my fieldwork, individuals, young girls particularly, that are the focus of this thesis, viewed themselves in connection with the other family members, for example brothers. To have a lifelong protection from the brothers, it was important to adhere to certain rules and not fail the trust and respect of a brother. At the same time, the girls did not always agree with what was prescribed to them. As I will demonstrate later, starting from an early age, young women learned how to use the existing authority and dominance in their favour. Similar to what Joseph demonstrates, the girls' identity is established in intimate relationships with the other family members. Such connective relationship did not only work for the young girls but even was important for social existence within Tajik community.

Suad Joseph's work (1999) on patriarchal connectivity therefore, is a framework that could be applied to understand the dynamics in Tajik families. Not denying the dominance and hierarchy, she demonstrates closely what I have found during fieldwork in Tajikistan. Family members were not necessarily demonstrating oppression and power. They participated in each other's lives

and assisted one another in becoming a fully able Tajik individual who could appreciate the connection between people and live in the community based on such connection, respect and mutual responsibilities. Joseph's work however, although demonstrates the ability of the people she describes in her studies to make individual choices does not focus much on the notion of agency. I however, would like to focus more in discussing the notion of agency here for the reasons described below. Nevertheless, describing agency separately, I do not suggest viewing it as a separate notion from patriarchal connectivity. Agency is in fact possible as part of this connectivity. As I will demonstrate in the empirical chapters, girls were able to make self-interested choices due to the intimate connections they shared with other family members.

Agency in patriarchal connectivity

Women's role in the patriarchal families mostly comes in two ways. Some describe the women as entirely submissive with no voice of their own (Minces, 1980, Poliakov, 1992). Others believe living under such dominance is not possible and suggest there must be some kind of resistance from the women against the power (Abu-Lughod, 1999, Harris, 2004). I do not focus on analysing the first type of literature in this thesis, because I think by now it is fully established that such submission is not possible. I analyse the second type of literature here, particularly Harris's work (2004). Harris's book 'Control and subversion' is the most influential and recent analysis of family and gender relations in Tajikistan. As part of this book, Harris, is also, to the best of my knowledge, the only scholar suggesting resistance against the power

dominance in Tajik families. In contrast to Harris, however, I believe the limited expression of interest is not always a resistance, but an agency that is possible under the dominant structure due to the connections that family members share. I define agency here as the capacity to act for one's interest (Kortweg, 2008).

Describing gender relations in Tajikistan in her book, Harris (2004) argues that women are not submissive as they find ways of resisting community and family control. Influenced by western theorists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997a), for Harris the limited freedom that the subordinates demonstrate, whether man or woman, is a type of resistance. Similar to other western scholars, she argues that those who are in subordinate positions, and who have to adhere to certain gender norms, do not fully internalize their gendered roles. Drawing on the idea of gender performativity expounded by Judith Butler (Butler, 1997a), Harris therefore concludes Tajik men and women are forced to wear a 'gendered mask' to play the role assigned to them where necessary and yet be separate individuals.

Although I agree with Harris on the impossibility of complete subordination, in contrast to her, I believe resistance is not necessary. The dominant family type, which is also associated with collectivistic type of families, where family interests are of more importance than that of an individual, in fact is also able to accommodate the interests of separate individual family members. For me what Harris represents as resistance, is thus an expression of an agency, or an embedded agency, the agency that is accommodated within the family itself. The difference is between seeing agency as a resistance towards weakening the dominance, and embedded agency which exists under

the dominant family type without the aim of destroying it and yet actively engaging in shaping one's life (Kortweg, 2008). According to Kortweg 'by seeing agency as potentially embedded in social forces like religion, which are typically construed as limiting agentic behaviour, the capacity to act is not contingent on adopting liberal "free will" and "free choice" approaches to subjectivity' (p. 437).

Similarly Saba Mahmood's (2001) introduces the concept of different forms of 'desire'. She argues against liberal feminists on the possibility of agency only to resist the dominance. In her work, Mahmood (2001) looks at the notion of human agency and argues against feminist scholarship suggesting any expression of agency as women's resistance towards male dominance and desire to oppose Islamic revivalism (Mahmood, 2001). Although Mahmood also draws her theory on Judith Butler she suggests a different approach. She focuses on Butler's analysis where Butler demonstrates two separate moves. First of all Butler demonstrates how resistance to norms exist within the structure of power itself rather than created by an individual; and second Butler links this resistance as an act of agency, or in other words, Butler sees agency as 'a capacity to subvert norms' (p. 211). Mahmood agrees with the first suggestion of the agency being embedded in the existing norms however she finds the second part of Butler's analysis, problematic. She argues that:

'The liberatory goals of feminism should be rethought in the light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations, and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject' (p.223).

Mahmood claims that agency provided by the dominant structure, does not always mean desire for change but can also be aimed towards continuity and stability. She uses her concept to analyse the participation of women in the Islamic movement in Egypt. For Mahmood however, women use the agency not necessarily for improving their lives in the way many of us understand it, in other words seeking freedom and better social and economic possibilities. She demonstrates how women use veiling, which is often viewed as a symbol of oppression, as an embodied capacity to realise forms of interiority. Kandiyoti's famous patriarchal bargain on the other hand demonstrates how embedded agency is used within the 'classical patriarchy' by women to negotiate their interest (Kandiyoti, 1988). According to Kandiyoti (1988), women willingly demonstrate such signs of patriarchy as submissiveness and seclusion claiming in return that men implement their part of the bargain and thus provide protection. Kandiyoti however, interprets such actions as passive resistance rather than demonstration of an agency.

For me however, agency is unseparated part of the patriarchal connectivity, Suad Joseph (1993, 1994, 1999) demonstrates. I view agency as possible because of the intimate connections that family members have in Tajikistan. Dianne Baxter (2007) in a similar way draws on Mahmood's notion of agency (2001) and Suad Joseph's notion of patriarchal connectivity (1999). While Joseph's notion of patriarchy is based on male dominance over female, Baxter in contrast argues that '...there are times and spaces in which women, backed by social structure and cultural norms (rather than as resistance to them) are themselves privileged, even dominant' (Baxter, 2007, p. 76). Although the girls in my study were not dominant, Baxter's work is nevertheless

an excellent example of both the importance of connectivity and possibility to demonstrate agency and make decisions without undermining the weight of hegemonic forces. Women in her work through the honour code, a code described by many as repressive (as demonstrated earlier) and according to Baxter 'honour-as-problem-for-women-and-progress paradigm' (p.738) are able to make self-interested decisions. She demonstrates how the notion of honour gives women privilege, power and claims on men, who have broad responsibilities towards women.

The findings from my field work demonstrate how early arranged marriage, which is seen as sign of domination and is described as display of power and submission (Harris, 2004) would not be possible without young girls participation. Although women were not dominant as in Baxter's work (2007), 'Backed by ... cultural norms' (Baxter, 2007 p. 764), the girls did not try to break the hegemony but used the existing forces and the intimate connections in choosing their future marriage partners. I bring several case studies in chapter 8 to show how age and gender hierarchy and the intimate relations played in favour of the young girls in their negotiation for the desired married partner. At the same time, I do not deny the existence of cases where young Tajik girls were unable to find a way out of the marriage with an unwanted groom or his family. I heard stories about forced marriages of young girls that did not have 'happy ending'. Such cases however shocked not only me, but also the families because they still appeared uncommon among Tajik families.

This section looked at the possibility of agency or ability to act for one's own interest under the dominant family type. The agency I represented here is not a separate notion from the patriarchal connectivity described earlier. Agency is possible due to the connection and relationship among different family members. I nevertheless analysed agency separately, because I wanted to emphasise its difference from resistance or 'desire to break free'. This section is a continuation of the argument therefore, that the dominant Tajik family does not use such practice as early marriage to demonstrate dominance or further oppress Tajik girls. Even though dominant, family members share responsibility, love and care towards each other and the girls are therefore able to act on their own interest using various forces, such as intimate connections. The girls therefore do not need to resist the family type under which they live, as it accommodates their interest.

Conclusion

This chapter had two goals. Firstly, it analysed the causes of early/child marriage identified in the literature. Although the previous studies did not focus on Tajikistan, the latest studies demonstrate how religion, culture, socio-economic and political context shaped the preferred age of marriage for girls in other developing countries. While the research has been extensive, the studies did not cover all the important aspects of child marriage. As this type of marriage involves girls that are still children, a significant role is dedicated to the families. The families however, have not been analysed separately. It is thus

difficult to understand the family relationship, their feelings and emotions when arranging such marriage.

The second part of the chapter consequently looked at the family relationship that has been missed by the literature on child marriage. Family relations has been thus analysed in the context of Tajikistan. With this type of literature, we saw that, although child marriage as a phenomenon has not been studied separately, such practices are closely associated with the type of the families that Tajik families have namely dominant and patriarchal households. Tajik families has been described in the literature as patriarchal starting from the Soviet period and received enormous attention of the western scholars in the last years. Most of the literature analysed in this part, demonstrates Tajik families as patriarchal based on dominance and subordination. As a result, women's status in Tajik families has been described as the most oppressed. Early marriage therefore appears as a norm of patriarchal Tajik families.

I agree with the existence of dominance in Tajik families through the findings of this study. Nevertheless, dominance in Tajikistan does not mean oppression or control and therefore represents lack of affectionate feelings among family members. I thus argue in this study that affectionate feelings, such as care, love, respect and responsibility are possible between parents and children similar to the rest of the world. To take this argument further, I base my findings on 'patriarchal connectivity' suggested by Suad Joseph (1993, 1994, 1999). According to the patriarchal connectivity, individuals in collectivist families value intimate relationships and connections and see themselves as an extension of significant others. Decisions therefore, such as marriage arrangement, are done for the younger family members not with the goal of

oppressing the latter but as part of responsibility, love and care. The girls at the same time, do not 'desire' to free themselves from this family type, as usually anticipated. The intimate relationship allows the girls to make self-interested decisions, or express agency at different points of their lives, including marriage arrangement. Later chapters explore in detail, how this framework can be applied in the case of Tajikistan.

Chapter 3

Historical analysis of marriage patterns

The goal of this chapter is to analyse how various historical periods with different socio-economic, religious and political contexts altered the decisions on marriage patterns made by Tajik families. In examining the effect of these on families' decisions, this chapter also demonstrates how values, such as dominance and subordination, were retained through different periods. Such values, however, were flexible depending on what opportunities the specific period provided. Thus, this chapter argues that although factors, such as socio-economic situation of the families, modernization, availability or lack of schools and adequate employment¹⁷ are relevant in the case of Tajikistan, other expectations, particularly the belief about patriarchal families enforcing traditional values on the women do not seem to be universally applicable. Although always dominant, Tajik family preferences, such as early age of marriage for girls, changed constantly through different periods depending on the availability or lack of opportunities for women.

Sophie Roche (2010) in her analysis of marriage patterns among young men in Tajikistan refers to marriage as an 'indicator of change' (p.283). She demonstrates how different periods shift power balance in the families and make the young Tajik men 'independent' in their marriage choices. This argument is persuasive although I use it in a slightly different way. As I am examining the marriage age among women, unlike young Tajik men, are always under the protection and influence of their families, I rather look at how families'

¹⁷ See chapter 2 for the causes of child marriages in other countries

decisions in regards to the young girls' marriage fluctuated depending on the context of a particular time. Similarly, Nahda Shehada (2008) argues that people have a variety of reasons to decide at what age their children should get married. She suggests that understanding this complexity '*...requires recognizing people's views as well as how particular factors influence their decisions at specific period, which might not appear to be relevant at another*' (p.338). Shehada analyses historically the marriage age of women in Gaza and demonstrates how factors associated with the age of marriage in developing countries (discussed in chapter 2) are prone to change all the time. Similarly, I aim to demonstrate in this chapter that families' decisions, although always based on dominance and authority, changed through times, because certain decisions seemed necessary at one period were not so important in another.

Three eras will be the focus of this chapter: (1) the years before the Bolshevik revolution, the Tsarist era; (2) the years of the Soviet Union from 1917-1992; (3) the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union also known as the years of independence. In each section, I first of all briefly describe the socio-economic, religious and political context of each period. These are important to analyse, as the overall argument in this chapter is that the various external factors effect families' everyday choices and decisions. Hence, after analysing these, each section looks into overall changes in families' decisions, particularly those concerning women's status. Lastly, I focus on marriage patterns and age of marriage and will analyse how the age changed and what triggered the change. Although the focus is on Tajikistan, where necessary, I will mention other relevant work that has been conducted in the whole Central Asian region. Most of this chapter is based on reviewing the existing literature.

However, in the absence of other written sources, in section 3.4 I share my own observation on the current state policies and messages targeted at women's roles in contemporary Tajikistan.

3.1 The Russian Tsarist era in Central Asia

The Russian Tsarist era in Central Asia is mostly portrayed from historical perspective. It should thus be noted here, that while general development of socio-economy, religion and culture can be traced, the questions the thesis is interested in, namely women's status, marriage age and preferences are difficult to analyse due to the lack of the relevant, first-hand literature.

Socio-economic, religious and social changes

The pre-Soviet period of Central Asia is documented mainly after the Russian Tsarist conquest in late 19th century. Most of Central Asia was under direct governance of the Russian military, while some part was left under emirate governance. According to the literature Russians conquered Central Asia only for the purpose of occupying the whole Asian territory and therefore had no intention to *modernize* the people, improve their living condition or the territory itself (Krausse, 1973). Thus, the Russians intended to leave the customs untouched. No attempts were for example, made to convert the Muslim population of the region to Russian orthodox Christianity leaving Islam and *Sharia* [Islamic law] the main basis for administration (Takhirov, 1987, cited in Tett, 1996)

The economy was one area the Russians were interested in intervening directly, though with the aim of enriching the Russian empire rather than improving living conditions of the local people. (Bacon, 1966). Cotton production became the focus and cotton-ginning factories were established where the local people worked as hired workers. Moreover, the estates of the land owners were broken up and given to peasants for cultivation. These changes did not however improve the life of poor peasants but rather worsened it. Some peasants received the land to lose it again as a result of the debt they had to take to buy the seeds for the crops. The Russian taxation was also unfamiliar to the peasants and it had to be paid in coin. People were torn sometimes between planting all their land with cotton, which they were forced to do, or plant some grain to provide food for their families (Bacon, 1966 p. 108). Poverty was thus prominent at this period. At the same time, Kamp (2006, p. 26) notes that more women were involved in a 'cash economy', as a result of the growth in the textile sector. Kamp refers to the census of 1897, which shows that 10 percent of the native women were engaged in one or another type of occupation related to textiles.

As *Sharia* was the 'official' law, it remained influential in deciding most civil cases including marriage and divorce (Brusina, 2009) among the locals. The non-natives were judged according to Russian law. According to Brusina (2009), the Russian government was aware of the difficult situation of Central Asian women and therefore as exception, the marital cases on violation of women's rights could appeal to the Russian court directly, unlike other violations. Such practices, as Brusina claims, show that the rights of Central

Asian women were extended to some point, at this period. This is however difficult to confirm as no other literature indicates such an extension of women's rights.

At the same time however, Bacon (1996) notes that it was due to this limited interference that the religious practice of the locals changed at this period. According to her religious pressure on men to pray five times a day weakened and people living in the towns did not pray as much as they used to before the Russian empire. Moreover, the availability of railroads increased the opportunities for Central Asians such as pilgrimage to Mecca and as a result exposed locals to Islam outside the region. At the same time, as Bacon (1966) demonstrates further, many rich families in Central Asia sent their children to study in *madrasah* [religious schools] of other cities, as Istanbul or Cairo, which weakened the power of the local religion even more. Religion, as it was practiced in Central Asia before the Russian invasion thus changed to include a wider interpretation of Islam.

The same patterns were observed in other areas. Hence, even though the Russian Tsarists did not aim to educate the nation, exposure to other cultures as well as opportunity to travel to other countries increased the interest of the local people in education. Elizabeth Bacon (1966) demonstrates, as a result of experiencing completely different cultures, education improved significantly at the period of Russian empire. Bacon describes how young people from rich families returned from Russian schools with new ideas that prevailed in Europe at that time. These young local men were accompanied by young Tatars who arrived to the region to teach in *madrasahs* and brought the new 'modernized' concept of Islam (Bacon, 1966).

Thus, the new intelligentsia of Central Asian was born as a result of the cultural exchange and cultural exposure to Russians as well as the new wave of education. The joint unit of local intelligentsia consisting of young urban men mixed with Muslim Tatars resulted in a movement called *Jadid* that was active in 1910. Marianne Kamp (2006) discusses the *Jadid's* activity in details in her work. As *Jadid* meant new or modern, this new group desired to change the Central Asian community and modernize it. According to Kamp (2006), among those ideas, was a goal to tackle two issues. One of their first concerns was around women's education in Central Asia. The argument was that the Central Asian nation was left behind because the mothers of nation were uneducated. The discussion around women's reform, however, was not in the light of improving women's own status, according to Kamp's analysis but it was in the framework of making those better wives/partners to the men and better mothers to bring up intelligent sons. Although Kamp (2006) demonstrates the argument around women's role in Uzbekistan at that time between the two types of *Jadids*, local Central Asian *Jadids* and Tatars, the overall discussion on women's education is quite extraordinary by itself.

The second issue discussed by *Jadids*, as Kamp (2006) demonstrates, was marriage practices, particularly the age of marriage in Central Asia. While *Jadids* believed in importance of marriage for the girls that 'old maids' (Kamp, 2006, p. 43) have no place in Central Asia, the focus was rather on the marriage age of men. The 1897 census that Kamp (2006) cites in her work, shows that the majority of girls were married by the age of 15 and 19 while for men the age was 30 and 39 (p. 43). According to this data, even though for the girls the marriage age was quite early, the focus of the *Jadids* was not on the

early marriage of girls but on the late marriage among men. Postponing the marriage, as the argument continued, had social and health implications. Men who married later would have serious health complications as a result of refraining from sex. At the same time, the unmarried men were more likely to commit criminal acts. The target of the reform was the bride-price, which poor young peasants could not afford to pay and thus had to delay their marriage (Kamp, 2006). Nevertheless, even though focused on men and as Kamp (2006) notes it was advocated largely in the interest of men (p.49), marriage reform was deemed necessary due to the poverty level among regular peasants. Here, I would like to argue that, although late marriage age among men was due to poverty, as reported by *Jadids*, it was probably early for girls for the same reason. I will return to this question later in this chapter.

Families' decisions and age of first marriage in Tsarist Central Asia

The changes in socio-economic and political spheres of the Tsarist era did not leave the families' decisions uninfluenced. In fact, the birth of the first Central Asian intelligentsia, mentioned above, was a result of such family decision. Improved infrastructure and availability of choices made the families of young men, especially rich families, contribute more to educating their sons. These educated young men in turn wanted to influence the decisions made by other families through promoting women education and bargaining the bride price as discussed earlier. At the same time, the poverty among peasants was extreme, as most lost their lands and were indebted with the changes in the economy (Bacon, 1966) that some could not afford taking a wife (Kamp, 2006).

Families' attitude towards women was described in particularly 'dark' colours. Although some scholars agreed that women's status varied depending on her labour and economic input into the families (Andreev, 1953, Kislyakov, 1959), it is mostly described as extremely oppressive. Portrayed by mostly Russian activists and Russian ethnographers, it has been noted that, 'Before the October Revolution...no humans have been more ignorant, more downtrodden and enslaved, than the Eastern women' (Massell, 1974 p. 96). The description went further: 'An Eastern women's life was one of "deepest tragedy". She was a "prisoner of gloomy *ichkari*", the female quarters, where she was "walled in". She was "a man's accessory" ... "a voiceless slave", a "beast of burden" ... "without even a conscious sense of being alive" ... "for ages her path had been a bloody one..." (Nukhrat, OZV, cited in Massell, 1974 p. 121-122). Women were described as illiterate, burdened with heavy duties of working in in house as well as the field, with no social participation and complete seclusion and no legal rights (Kislyakov, 1959, Masharipova, 1990, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Pal'vanova, 1982). Their family life was even worse. From early childhood they were treated as 'second-class member of the family' (Masell, 1974 p. 110), tied down with the heavy work of the household. As girls were seen as a danger to the honour of the men, as soon as they reached adolescents, they had to hide themselves under the heavy *paranja*.

The age of first marriage for girls is difficult to estimate due to the tendency of the Russian literature to represent the status of the women focusing on the negative sides of the culture and family practices. Thus, for example Pal'vanova

(1982) argues that girls were rushed off to marriage as early as at nine years of age. According to her, the girl's father as a patriarch choose her future husband, negotiated *kalym* and 'sold' to anyone who would pay a good price. Sometimes the girls from poor families were given away for a sack of rice (Pal'vanova, 1982). At the same time, Kislyakov (1959) and Andreev (1925) demonstrate how age of marriage varied depending on the place of residence, where the earliest age was 7 for girls and the latest 16. However, if the girl was married at an early age, she moved to her husband's house but did not have a sexual relationship until she was physically ready (Kislyakov, 1959). At the same time, depending on the economic situation of the family, richer families were able to have their children married earlier in comparison to the poor families (Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992).

Kislyakov (1959) in analysing *kalym* [bride price] describes very precisely the economic effect of *kalym* on the age of marriage. Although most of his analysis is focused on the difficulties of men in paying *kalym* and therefore postponing their marriage (similar to Jadid's arguments, discussed above), Kislyakov, mentions the age of marriage for the girls as well (p.147). The age families married off their children, especially girls, depended largely on the financial situation of the family. For the impoverished family, marriage of a girl meant receiving a bride price, which could feed the rest of the family (Kislyakov 1959). Thus, families with beautiful girls, according to Kislyakov (1959) were in a good position, as rich families were willing to pay high prices for such brides. It has even been noted that due to the difficult economic situation, the girls were married to financially better off families and sometimes as second or third wives (Massell, 1974). In a situation similar to this, scholars assume that girls were

used only for economic exchange (Brusina, 2009). Such an argument, as I would like to demonstrate in this thesis, is however assumed rather than confirmed, as it lacks the information from the families' side.

The Soviet analyses of pre-Soviet women's life is therefore pessimistic. However, the reliability of the information is potentially questionable, as it has been produced in the early years of the Soviet Union in the context of the Soviet discussion around the 'women's question'. Therefore, as Massell (1974) argues, the analyses were conducted with a clear goal in mind. According to him presenting women as the most oppressed, the Soviets were hoping to manipulate sexual and generational tensions to facilitate revolutionary changes. Moreover, the ideological control over anthropology of that time is noted (Gellner, 1980) and can clearly be sensed from the literature where the scholars demonstrate the 'success' of the Soviet Union over the traditional culture. Such an orientalist representation has been criticized however. Said (2003), for example, notes that this can serve as justification for colonial ambitions to 'save' the Orient as backward, traditional and barbaric. Further, as I go on to show, the 'oppressed' and 'voiceless' representation of women has been questioned in recent years by various scholars (Abu-Lughod, 1999, Baxter, 2007, Kandiyoti, 1988, Mahmood, 2001, Tremayne, 2006).

Thus, on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution socio-economic and political changes influenced the decisions made by the families at different levels. Even if the Russian empire was not interested in 'civilizing' the Central Asian nation, it

nevertheless brought changes in the social and economic life of the local people. One of the most distinct changes was associated with the first intelligentsia consisting of young Muslim men that received their education outside of the region and therefore were full of new ideas. Although it been noted that the discussion only focused on improving the men's status rather than women (Kamp,2006), the question on women's status was brought into the light for the first time during this period.

It is, however, very difficult to analyse the status of women and the marriage age during this period. Most of the literature described women as extremely oppressed during this time due to traditional, cultural and religious beliefs and practices. However, such a representation was built primarily by Soviet scholars and activists and, as argued above, can be questioned. Therefore the age of first marriage, which is demonstrated as the age of nine for girls, is said to be based on Islamic law. It has been demonstrated that the girls were married off because they were considered as burden and were viewed only as a commodity, which could be exchanged or sold.

At the same time, while culture, tradition and religion have been criticised by Russian scholars, there has been little analysis of the economic situation of the families. Although it is understandable, why the narratives focused on culture, tradition and religion in the early years of the Soviet Union times, it has been argued in the recent years that culture, tradition and religion cannot be sole determinants in the decline of the marriage age for the girls (Ahmed and Bould, 2004, Arland, 1991, Bahramitash and Kazemipour, 2006, Bates et al., 2007, Garenne, 2004, Scott and Warren, 2007). At the same time, recent studies on child marriage demonstrate poverty as one the main reason for declining the

age of marriage for girls (Jensen and Thornton, 2003, Malhotra, 1997, Mathur et al., 2003, Nobles and Bottenheim, 2008, Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003, Shehada, 2008, Westoff, 2003). I would therefore like to argue that, families' decisions in the Tsarists years, regarding the age of girls' marriage, even if as early as the age of nine could have been triggered by the extreme poverty. From the sparse literature, such a struggle is evident (Bacon, 1966; Kamp, 2006; Brusina, 2009, Roche, 2010 p. 268), where poor peasants were more impoverished under the new colony. Although religion and tradition probably accommodated early marriage, poverty could be a reason for the age of marriage declining for the girls in the pre-Soviet era.

3.2 The Soviet period in Central Asia

After the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviets came to power and reached Central Asia by 1920. The new Russians were dedicated to changing the region's political, economic, cultural and religious system rather than simply controlling it. Describing in details all the changes brought by the Soviet system is rather an impossible task. However, as it important to mention those briefly as this chapter demonstrates how changes influenced the families' decisions.

Socio-economic, religious and social reform

The goal of the Soviet government was to create a Communist country, where people had equal standing with no division between the rich and the poor. The aim was to create a new political, cultural and ideological system based on Marxist-Leninist ideology (Bacon, 1966, Massell, 1974). An important

step in the Marxist-Leninist ideology was economic reform, which had two main goals: (1) reorganize the economy based on egalitarianism and universal ownership; (2) modernize and industrialize the traditional regions (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970). The economic reform started from confiscating the land from the private owners and making it available for collective usage. This redistribution along with an attack on religious sites created political instability and resulted in the resistance movement called *Basmachi*¹⁸, which was broken by the Soviets in the mid-1920s. The collectivization of agriculture therefore officially started in the early 1930s where all agriculture was brought under the control of collective farms known as *kolkhoz*.

Along with collectivization, the modernization part of the economic reform started. To 'modernize' the economy the state had to develop the local people's skills and knowledge. As part of the socioeconomic program, such projects as education, health care and improving living conditions, started in the territory of the Soviet Union including Central Asia. With schooling made compulsory up to 17 years of age for both boys and girls new schools were built. The number of school rose from 382 in 1920 to 2,628 in 1940 to (Payne, 1990 cited in Tett, 1996 p. 33). Health care was free and available to everyone with the number of hospital beds rising from 100 in 1913 to 9,700 in 1956 (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970) While the numbers are quite impressive, it has been argued that the statistics were mostly provided by the state, and therefore their accuracy has been questioned.

¹⁸ Translated as 'bandits' into Russian, see Roche, 2009, p. 55 citing Hayit, 1992

At the same time while efforts were taken to improve the socio-economic life, religious practice was under attack. The communist party perceived religion as the major enemy of development, although tolerance towards religion fluctuated depending on the political context (Bacon, 1966). It seems from the literature that the Soviet party used religion as a way of winning people's sympathy at the times it needed the Soviet people to be united. Thus, for example, during the early years of the Soviet Union the Communist party declared the religious freedom to be a right of every Soviet citizen. Later, however, in 1920, the policy changed, banning religion everywhere including Central Asia. The tolerance towards religion was visible again during the World War II. Such a shift during the war is interpreted as an attempt to gain the support of the Muslim population in the fight against German fascism (Bacon, 1966).

The 'women question' in Central Asia

Even though the so-called 'women question' was a priority for the Communists in the whole Soviet Union (for more information on women question in Soviet Union see Buckley, 1989, Jancar, 1978, Lapidus, 1978), it was of a particular focus in Muslim Central Asia. Here, women were used as a tool for succeeding with the Soviet plans and ideology, when the majority of Central Asians did not welcome Bolsheviks ideas of 'saving the world' by 'liberating the oppressed' as they expected (Massell, 1974). The poor peasant who already had an experience of living under Russians did not support yet another type of Russians or *infidels*. In an attempt to gain some support in the region, the Communist Party turned its attention to the women identifying them

as 'surrogate proletariat' as Massell (1974) points out. According to Massell, by pinpointing women as the most oppressed nation in Central Asia, the Soviets tried to create a tension between gender and sex in the region that would nurture a revolutionary mood. Some of the narratives of the Soviet activists were demonstrated in the previous section. As argued earlier, the Soviet activists portrayed Central Asian women as oppressed by their own culture, tradition, religion and families. The argument was that: 'The human tongue is too weak to depict fully the fate of an Eastern woman'¹⁹ (Nukhrat, cited in Massell, 1974 p. 120). Central Asian women were pictured as 'enslaved, sluggish, backward part of the population' (Pal'vanova, 1982, p.5) The purpose of such narratives, however, is not clear, as I also argued earlier. Nevertheless, these arguments were followed by a range of activities and new legal norms aimed at ending what the communists called 'crimes based on customs' (Massell, 1974).

The most aggressive campaign against such crimes, called *hujum* or assault, took place in Uzbekistan in 1927 that targeted one of the obvious signs of women's oppression at that time, the veil. *Hujum* thus was a liberation action to remove the symbol of oppression and seclusion against the women, namely the veil. It was expected that this campaign would be a symbol of a 'new era - that of a free Muslim woman' (Pal'vanova, 1982 p.93) in Central Asia. Thousands of women publicly took off their veils and burnt them during the campaign²⁰.

¹⁹ As Massell (1974) notes, the term 'Eastern' referred to all Asian women, that is Central Asian, Caucuses and Siberian, however was used more often in relation to Central Asian women (p.120)

²⁰ *Hujum* was a big event that would require pages of description. For details, see Northrop, 2004 and Kamp, 2006.

Most Central Asian men and even some conservative women perceived Hujum as a direct assault on tradition. Women who participated in the *hujum* and the families that supported the unveiling were attacked, raped, injured or killed²¹. The reaction to *hujum* was so strong that it made the State reconsider its policy and view the liberation of women not as a separate programme but as an addition to overall social change. Women were encouraged to participate in education, labour force and social life. Even though veiling was not banned, it was seen as a 'feudal survival' and forcing women to veil was then considered a criminal act followed by a severe punishment (Kamp, 2006).

Marriage reform

Along with unveiling, the Soviet state took very straightforward actions towards setting changes in the marriage practices. To modernize these, religious courts, namely *Sharia* were closed and replaced by a new Soviet civil code. According to this code and the active interest of Women's departments or *Jenotdel*, (a department established specifically to deal with women's question), the minimum marriage age was increased to 17 for boys and 16 for girls (Masharipova, 1990, Pal'vanova, 1982) while according to *Sharia* it was nine for girls and 12 for boys. *Nikoh*, a religious marriage ceremony, was replaced by compulsory registration of marriages. The registration was to first of all ensure that the groom, and most importantly the bride, was not below the legal age of

²¹ Such a strong reaction to unveiling is explained differently by various scholars. Douglas Northrop (2004) suggests that communists themselves triggered the violent resistance against such cultural changes, as the unveiling. According to him, the communists strengthened cultural values making such symbols as the veil a national pride and representation. Forcing to remove the veil later during *hujum* therefore was perceived as an attack against the culture itself, which resulted in the violence. Marianne Kamp (2006), however, argues that the violence that followed the mass unveiling was not a protest against the State itself. According to her, such protest was the men's attempt to keep the patriarchal structure in the families, the only authority left to them with all the other changes.

marriage and second that both young people gave their consent to the marriage (Masharipova, 1990, Pal'vanova, 1982, Tiurin, 1962). Such practices as polygamy and paying or receiving *kalym* [bride price] were banned completely and women gained equal rights with men in divorce (Masharipova, 1990, Pal'vanova, 1982, Tiurin, 1962). In addition, as Edgar (2007) demonstrates, interethnic marriages were encouraged throughout the Soviet Union to reinforce the development of unified Soviet citizens. I will demonstrate later how these changes effected families' choices and practices.

At the same time while efforts were taken to improve the socio-economic life, religious practice was under attack. The communist party perceived religion as the major enemy of development, although tolerance towards religion fluctuated depending on the political context. As we have seen from this section so far, the marriage reform was supported by other actions, such as involving women in public life through education and employment and providing social and health care benefits. The official statistic claimed that literacy rates in Soviet Union in 1939 among women between ages nine to fifty were at 73 percent in Uzbekistan (Kamp, 2006). By 1970 the literacy rate was almost 100 percent in the region (Keller, 2007). Tett (1996, citing Karimova, 1988, p. 42) mentions that 50 percent of women worked in agriculture and 30 percent in industry in 1970. These are however official numbers and their credibility could be questioned. Nevertheless, it is clear that women's role in society had increased. This change was also confirmed during the fieldwork for this study, as the

respondents remembered the years of the Soviet time with nostalgia and as 'years of easy life'²².

Now that we looked into the changes of the Soviet period, the question that needs to be addressed next is how families' decisions were effected by these legal, social, religious, economic and cultural changes.

Family practices

The Central Asian families have always been described as strictly patriarchal (Kislyakov, 1959, Masharipova, 1990, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Pal'vanova, 1982).). Although the Russian literature praises the positive changes the Soviet Union brought to Central Asia, including changes in family relationships (Masharipova, 1990, Monogarova and Mukhiddinov, 1992, Shukurova, 1970, Vasileva, 1989), it seems that the Soviet state struggled to eradicate these traditional values. Tajik families kept their tradition irrespective of the Soviet efforts to re-structure the tradition, culture and the family itself, leading to criticism from Russian scholars. As Poliakov (1992) argues:

'Central Asia to be mired down by the weight of traditionalism-that is, by "everyday Islam": the customs, values, and economic practices of traditional rural Islamic society...these age old folkways, reinforced by religious authority and traditional elites, are at the root of the region's

²² I do not focus on the years of the Soviet period in the empirical chapters, as the study was not looking into generational changes of marriage age throughout times. Nevertheless, the older people mentioned the 'prosperity' of the Soviet times and 'availability of material goods' during those years, particularly when talking about economic hardship of the recent years.

stagnation; only by breaking with that past can Central Asia become a modern and prosperous society.' (p.xiv)

Nevertheless, although the Soviet party criticized patriarchy and promoted nuclear families to replace the extended families, breaking up the family ties and the patriarchal ladder was one of the unachieved tasks throughout the whole of the Soviet Union period, according to Tett (1996.p.46). The Soviet State provided employment to make children economically independent so they could construct their own families away from their father's families upon marriage. Yet the close relationship remained unbroken and young men were still responsible for supporting their parents (Bacon, 1966).

At the same time however, while family as a unit was still strong and individuality never replaced collectivist type of the families, women gained some 'mobility'. The 'public life' of women was improved during the Soviet time; women were able or 'forced' to study, work and communicate freely with men without covering their faces and benefited from the free health care services and other social benefit packages (such as child benefits, paid maternity leaves and etc.). Tett (1996) indicates that even though there was a strong association of women belonging to the 'private space', women were not completely banned from participating in the 'public space' (p. 89). According to her women kept these two different roles when in a private and public space separately. She describes how women wore European clothes, worked along men and spent most of their days outside working, changed to traditional clothes, put on their headscarf and became a traditional wife and daughter-in-law once at home (Tett, 1996 p. 89). Moreover, it has been noted that it was women who kept

tradition and religion alive during the repressive years of the Soviet era. As, Islam could be practiced only at home, a sphere that was associated with women, religion was preserved by women during the Soviet Union. As a result, it was a complicated time for young girls. On the one hand, they had to follow the state propaganda and become a full Soviet modern citizen in European clothes, participating in education and employment, while at the same time girls had to live up to their community expectations where they had to be modest and keep the honour of the family (Kamp, 2007). This is interpreted by some as a failure of the Soviet Union to emancipate the Central Asian women, as I also demonstrate later in this chapter.

Marriage practices and age of marriage

As mentioned earlier, marriage and family practices became the target of the Soviet state in their fight against 'crimes based on culture'. At the same time, as also shown above, families kept their traditional, cultural and religious view throughout the Soviet period. The same appears to be true when it came to the marriage practices. The civil registration of marriages was aimed at controlling the age of marriage for both boys and girls, which as mentioned earlier, was the age of 18 according to the changes in Soviet Family legislation. The legislation however was not implemented as the locals found ways of keeping their practices unchanged. At the early years of the Soviet Union when rarely anyone had a registered birth, it was easy to manipulate the girls' age at marriage (Kamp, 2006 p. 116). Marriage age thus increased for the girls later. According to Tett (1996) by the end of Soviet era, it was unusual for girl to get

married before the age of 18 and the locals were even 'horrified' when they discussed the marriage of younger girls (p. 109).

Marriage partner selection also seems to have changed from the early years of the Soviet Union to later years. Thus Kamp (2006) shows that half of the women she interviewed had an arranged marriage in early 1930s, where their consent was not asked. Tett (1996, p. 99), at the same time, describes the marriage partner selection in a Tajik village in 1996. Even though the villagers in her study did not have one specific way, whether arranged as it used to be before the Soviet Union, or completely upon the young people's choice, as promoted by the State, opportunities such as studying and working outside of the village gave young people more chances of meeting other people.

The same practice applied to the marriage ceremony. If we recall from the earlier section, the state banned religious marriage *nikokh* and promoted a compulsory civil marriage registration. Traditional wedding was replaced by Komsomol wedding, where women had to abandon their traditional clothes in favour of a white Russian wedding gown. Moreover, such practices as bride price became illegal. People however, found alternatives to be both Muslim and a Soviet citizen. According to Tett (1996), the Soviet rituals of the Komsomol wedding were implemented not as alternatives but rather extensions of what existed before. At the same time, the marriage civil registration enforced by the Communists did not replace the religious ceremony *nikoh* either. While Tett indicates that families performed both, the religious ceremony and the civil registration, Brusina (2009) argues that *nikoh* was always considered more important.

The question of women's liberation and age of marriage during the Soviet period

Scholars' opinion regarding Soviet state success in emancipating women and improving their lives in Central Asia is divided. Even though many changes were introduced at this period, some particularly targeting the women, some of the scholars argue that Soviet state failed in improving their lives. Thus, Lapidus (1978) argues the only goal of the Soviet emancipation was not so much about liberating women but to organize them as a political and economic force. The Soviet Union was particularly criticized for the 'double burden' it created for Soviet women. In the context of Central Asia, women were forced to be active members of the society and work at the fields and yet take care of their children, husbands and their in-laws (Akiner, 1997). It has also been argued that the Soviet state created a 'Soviet paradox' (Kandiyoti, 2007) as its policies were contradictory, where on the one hand it encouraged women to actively participate in the public space, while at the same time it created barriers for the desired modernity (Kamp, 2005, Kandiyoti, 2007). At the same time enforcing change so aggressively the communist party made people cling to their tradition and provoked great opposition of the locals to the changes (Tadjbakhsh, 1998, Tohidi, 1998). While rural-urban differences and their impact on the overall development and the women status has been noted in Central Asia in general (Buckley, 1998), the family practices, as it has been argued, never fully abolished, as women played Soviet modern woman in public changed to traditional mother and wife in private (Tadjbakhsh, 1998, Tett, 1996). Although scholars' opinion about the overall women's emancipation is divided, all of them

agree that women were torn between tradition and modernity (Akiner, 1997, Constantine, 2007, Harris, 2004, Kamp, 2007, Tadjbakhsh, 1998, Tett, 1996).

Nevertheless, hostile at times in implementing the Soviet ideology and probably prone to failure in emancipating the women, the Soviet State made some undeniable changes in the families lives as we have seen in this section. The state provided economic and social benefits for women, including free education, guaranteed employment, a generous maternity leave, free day care and monthly supplements for women with children. Women got used to expecting a certain quality of life from the state (Constantine, 2007, Kamp, 2005). The literacy rate in Tajikistan reached 97.7% with no variation by gender and with 40% of women in higher education (UNESCO, 2006). Although gender-based occupation was still segregated, 50.9% of workers in Soviet economy were women with wages between 70 to 85% of men's wages (Pilkington, 1992), and about one third in government positions. With the health care services available at every remote area of Central Asia, women's life expectancy was nearly ten years longer than men's life expectancy (Constantine, 2007).

The improvement in the social and economic life, as I argue in this section, influenced the families' decisions in regards to the age of marriage for the Tajik girls. On the one hand, the families kept their tradition, culture and religious practice throughout the Soviet period, no matter how much the Soviet state worked to eradicate those. Women were still associated with the private space, brought up in a traditional way and encouraged to get married in time. Marriage never lost its importance and although some young people were able

to choose their own partner, marriages were arranged by their parents (Tett, 1996).

On the other hand, however, the new emerged opportunities persuaded the families to postpone their daughters' marriage. Introduction of compulsory secondary schooling system was one of the main reasons for postponing marriage for girls (Roche, 2010, p. 286, Tett, 1996, p. 110). Besides, an increased opportunity to participate in the labour market (Tett, 1996, p. 110) and to make a financial contribution into the family seems to be another reason. In addition to school and employment, improved medical facilities are reported to be another reason for postponing the marriage for Tajik girls. With availability of medical facilities giving birth in the hospitals became a normal practice which resulted in decreasing infant mortality rate (Kamp, 2006). Such improvements made people believe that even if a girl got married later she was still able to bear children (Tett, 1996, p. 110).

As a result, as this section demonstrated, women's role as wife and mother never changed and women continued to be associated with the inner, private space in the Soviet Central Asia. Such association did not depend on whether the women lived in rural area and worked in the field, or in urban area and enjoyed modernization and the little industrialization. No matter where, the women always returned to the traditional household, which was still based on patriarchal values, according to some scholars (see Poliakov, 1992 for example). Yet, as I demonstrated in this section, even though traditional, such decisions, as marriage patterns and particularly marriage age of women were positively influenced. The marriage age increased significantly from the age of

nine during Tsarist Empire to 17 during Soviet Union time. Traditional and family values therefore, are not the main determinants in marriage age of girls as I have been arguing in this chapter. If opportunities exist for the women, traditional values can be bent to accommodate those.

3.3 The post-Soviet period

Socio-economic, religious and political changes

The collapse of the Soviet Union is associated with the chaos and difficult economic and social transition that effected every corner of the post-Soviet republics. The transition however, was particularly difficult for Tajikistan. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the civil war from 1992-1993 had an enormous impact on the country's development on every level. Some of the consequences reported were human losses that were estimated at 60,000 deaths, leaving 25,000 widows and 55,000 orphans; material losses of a total amount of \$7 billion; nearly 1 million people were internally and externally displaced (Kuvatova, 2001). The war had a significant influence on Tajik people's overall wellbeing and ruined the social and physical infrastructure built during the Soviet times, leaving the country impoverished (Clifford et al., 2010, Khushkadamova, 2009, Kuvatova, 2001). The civil war and poor state governance resulted in widespread poverty at the community level. Even after eleven years of Tajik independence from the Soviet Union, 40% of the population lived in absolute poverty in 2009 (The World Bank, 2012). As a result of the poverty and lack of employment more than 500,000 people in the post-independence years, particularly young men, migrated each year to seek

employment outside Tajikistan (ILO, 2010). Migration became the main source of providing financial support to the households. According to the National Bank of Tajikistan (cited in World Bank, 2009), remittances sent home by migrants amounted to about USD 2.67 billion or 49 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008.

Poverty effected women more creating a 'feminization of poverty' in Tajikistan (EU Gender Watch, 2007). Not only did women receive lower salaries than men, but also they remained unemployed longer, and were fired more often from their jobs. The registered number of unemployed women increased through the years. According to state statistics in 1995 the number of officially registered unemployed women was 17,000 (46.1%), at the beginning of December of 2002 the number increased to 26.8 000 (55.8%), and at the end of November of 2004 officially registered number of unemployed women was 22.8 000 (56.5%) (EU Gender Watch, 2007). This is not a complete picture however, as many Tajik women are engaged in the unofficial labour market, as I will demonstrate later.

Along with employment, participation in secondary and higher education dropped in the post-Soviet period. Within the first six years of the Soviet collapse, enrolment rates in secondary school in the country were 15–20% lower than in 1970 (The World Bank, 2012). Girls in particular, but children in general from poor households, were less likely to attend school in the newly independent Tajikistan (Falkingham and Baschieri, 2005). Moreover, secondary education became non-compulsory in 1993. Such legislation put the decision in regards to educating the children fully in the hands of the families. The flexibility of the education system left many of the girls out of official school, as this

particular study also found out. Therefore, the education quotas created by the government to allow girls from the rural and economically disadvantaged families to enrol in higher education free and without state exams failed according to Silova et. al (2009). The non-compulsory secondary education resulted in a decrease in the level of usage of these higher education quotas. According to the latest statistics from the Ministry of Education (cited in Silova and Abdushukurova, 2009) the enrolment of girls at the secondary school level (grades 10-11) dropped to 39% and at the higher education level to 26%.

Health care services easily available during the Soviet times rapidly decreased. Most of the hospitals, health clinics were damaged as a result of the civil war. Those available, however, became unaffordable for poor people. While health care officially remained free in the country, unofficial costs to patients increased steadily through the years (Falkingham, 2003). As a result the number of women giving birth at home that were unattended by a skilled assistant rose, which resulted in high maternal mortality rate (Falkingham, 2003).

Religion, which was a private matter during the Soviet Union, gained freedom and became public again after the collapse of the Soviet state. The early years of independence are known for nationalism and Islamisation in Central Asia. In Tajikistan, the Islamisation has not been without a conflict as Harris demonstrates (Harris, 2000). Harris explains how the first step towards the reestablishment of pre-Soviet gender identities was to pressure urban girls and women to abandon their European clothes or to 'desovietize' themselves in favour of native costumes. Akiner claims that although most Central Asians

welcomed the return of Islam into the public space the majority still believe that religion and the state should be separate (Akiner, 1997). Islamisation, however, is rather slow in Central Asia, while nationalism is taking more power as the Central Asian presidents, at least in Tajikistan, emphasises the national symbol through creating a vision of a 'true Tajik woman'.

As the Soviet Union tried to eradicate Islam in Central Asia, it was not successful in eliminating the population's heritage of being Muslims. As Islamic teaching was completely banned, the Central Asians returned to practicing Islam, where being a Muslim was only a way of self-identification. As Gleason states 'virtually all indigenous Central Asians consider themselves Muslim, although a large number of Central Asians have only a vague idea about what that implies' (Gleason, 1997, p. 42). Gunn (2003) at the same time demonstrates how each of the Central Asian states in different ways adopted the Soviet model to control the level of religious practice in the counties. He argues that religion in this case is not the expression of beliefs and values related to Islam but is an instrument of social control. The state's obvious fear of Islamization became visible in recent years through its control over religious practice or opposing signs of over-islamization such as wearing *satr*, a new type of veil adopted by young Tajik women, or men's long beard as a sign of religious dedication (personal observation).

Women's role in the independent Tajikistan

The state-society relationship in general has been described as a factor influencing families' decisions, particularly those related to issues surrounding

women. Several studies describe the independence period in Eastern Europe and Central Asia as searching for pre-Soviet national origins and 're-traditionalization' of the society (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005, Tadjbakhsh, 1998, Tohidi, 1998). The early years are demonstrated in the light of nation building where women were targeted as representatives of the nation, similar to the Soviet times (Tadjbakhsh, 1998). In Tajikistan, Tadjbakhsh (1998) points to the role of women as political tools in the early years of independence to restore or renew a new cultural identity of the Tajik nation. Such attempts cannot be surprising taking into account the approach of the Soviet state towards Tajik culture. The question of female's equality as a result was perceived as one of the most visibly imposed changes, which were hoped to be over along the Soviet regime (Pilkington, 1992).

In the early 1990s, the Central Asian countries moved to democracy, market economy and capitalism. As a result of the democratization gender equality was expected in the region. In case of Tajikistan however, democratization did not improved gender achievement in general or at least maintain the level of the Soviet period. Nevertheless, Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan made an international commitment to promote international norms on gender equality in the countries. Gender equality however was last on anyone's mind when signing various Human Rights treaties. Thus Silova et al (2009) suggest that this was a tactical move rather than motivated by genuine commitment. They argue that Tajikistan used the 'travelling policies', such as gender equality in education, to prioritize the issues that could potentially attract international donors and increase external funding.

At the same time, it has been reported that patriarchal values that the Soviet system criticized and specifically targeted were once again strengthened in recent years. However, as Akiner (1997) notes during the Soviet times the patriarchal structure was perceived as backward that needed to be eradicated, while in the post-Soviet Central Asia, the traditional power balance was acknowledged with a sense of pride. The image of the president as ‘father of the nation’ (a term used by Shirin Akiner, 1997) and the concept of male dominance was returned in all Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan. This ‘father figure’ of the state president is clear in Tajikistan.

Similarly, the state influence on families has also been reported in the region. Kamp (2005), for example, demonstrates how state ideology influenced women’s status in Uzbekistan. According to Kamp, the post-Soviet Uzbekistan state continued providing maternal social benefits for women as mothers and decreasing support for them to work outside, as a clear message of the traditional women’s role as wives and mothers. Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is also reported as a result of state society relations. As Werner (2005) argues, the state little concern over women’s rights influenced the practice of bride kidnapping positively. It was however reinforced further as the state displayed its pride over national identity and practice.

To summarize, the Central Asian states, particularly Tajikistan went through difficult times adjusting to independence. The collapse of the Soviet state that ruled the region for 70 years left the country in chaos. Questions appeared that created confusion among people, such as (1) who should

undertake the leadership in the country, (2) what it means to be a Tajik; (3) what it meant to be a Muslim; (4) and simply how to survive socio-economically.

These questions determined the status of the newly independent Tajikistan and resulted in a civil war that further damaged the country's development and the people's well-being. As a result, Tajikistan was left with a weak state, high poverty rate, increased unemployment rate and a high flow of young Tajik migration. Women's status is reported as having worsened. The majority of Tajik women were back to their initial role as wives and mothers with little public role in the post-Soviet Tajikistan.

The next question that needs to be addressed now is how families' decisions were influenced by the changes discussed above.

Families' decisions in post-Soviet Tajikistan

Some scholars describe women as active promoters of social change or 'agents of change' at the difficult times of transition (Buckley, 1989). In general, although the post-Soviet transition was obviously difficult for women, according to the literature discussed above, some welcomed the idea of returning to the pre-Soviet tradition, as they never fully embraced the Soviet ideal of the modernized women (Tadjbakhsh, 1998).. At the same time however, the women who were under direct influence of the Soviet's 'modernization' project, that is women living in urban areas and therefore from the elite class, were the only one to make significant changes in their lives through establishing NGOs (Ishkanian, 2003).

Other women became active economically and undertook 'male's' roles. Cynthia Werner for example in her discussion of the new Silk Road²³ indicates the participation of women in the marketplace after the collapse of the Soviet Union due to growing unemployment among men (cited in Ishkanian, 2003). Similar trends have been reported in other parts of Tajikistan. In the southern region women carried a double burden of both the difficult job of trade and taking care of the household because of the failure of the state to provide a social security net (Kanji, 2002).

The participation of women in trade and undertaking of men's roles was associated with the high migration level of Tajik men. The seasonal migration, which became a phenomenon of the independence years is noted for its impact on the families' affairs. Although young and old, men and women are reported to leave the country in search for employment in other countries, particularly Russia, migration increased significantly among young Tajik men (World Bank, 2009).

Families perceived migration positively due to financial income but it nevertheless has been noted for the negative effect on family relations. Women that were left behind by migrant husbands are reported to be more socially and economically vulnerable. A study conducted in the country revealed that women from migrant families were more engaged in economic activity, supporting their children, in-laws and sometimes even extended family members (Olimova and Bosc, 2003). Although migration clearly gave women more authority, there are

²³ The Silk Road, or Silk Route, is explained in the dictionary as a series of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting the West and East by linking traders, merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads, and urban dwellers from China to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods.

also negative sides of this phenomenon. Women with migrant husbands are abused physically, verbally and economically by their in-laws and other family members (Amnesty International, 2009). They were also abandoned and divorced through text messages sent from Russia by their husbands who in many cases established new families outside of Tajikistan (Amnesty International, 2009)²⁴.

The impact of political and social instability has been noted for its influence on the families and their decisions throughout time and space²⁵. Thus, the impact of civil war in Tajikistan is noted by Kuvatova (2001). In her work, she demonstrates how male-female dynamics overall, and the women situation in particular, was affected as consequences of the war. According to Kuvatova, households headed by women increased in the years after the civil war forcing women to look for additional sources of income to support their families, such as being engaged in trade, working in agriculture and prostitution. Kuvatova also noted the growth in violence towards women in the post-civil war years both in private and public places, which she associates with the increase in socio-economic difficulties (p.130). The impact of the civil war on people is evident even today. Respondents of this study remembered the years of the war with fear. There was a strong message that they would tolerate poverty,

²⁴ The migration of young men to other countries, such as Russia has a significant and important effect on age of marriage in Tajikistan. Although I mention migration briefly throughout the thesis, I do not focus on it in detail in this work mainly because this study explored the age of marriage for girls from the girls' side, looking in particular at the strategies of the brides' families to increase the girls' marriageability. For information on migration and its influence on youth concepts see Roche (2009, p. 301); for general information on labour migration from Tajikistan see Olimova and Bosc (2003).

²⁵ For further literature review on the influence of political and social instability in other countries, refer to chapter 2 above.

hunger, lack of electricity, unemployment and lack of other social security, as long as there was no war in the country²⁶.

The re-birth of Islam and religious practice was yet another important factor that affected family's decisions in the years following the country's independence. According to Roi and Wainer (2009) the level of religiosity in Central Asia was the only 'anchor of stability and source of moral succour' (p.318) in a society that lacked principled directions. The scholars found out that although Islam was more of an identity than a practice for the majority of people in Central Asia, a surprising number of young educated people in Tajikistan adhered to Islamic practice in recent years (Ro'i and Wainer, 2009).

According to the findings of this study, families preferred religious education particularly for educating young girls. Stephan (2009) similarly, argues that due to the lack of interest or capacity of the state to fill out the gaps in the weak education system in post-Soviet Tajikistan, families undertook the upbringing of their children through religious education. Moreover, the state changes in the education in 1993 when secondary school attendance became non-compulsory, increased the popularity of the religious lessons. The outcome of the policy of non-compulsory education is also noted by Whitsel (2011). According to him the non-compulsory education, resulted in lower levels of school attendance among girls in Tajikistan. The preference to keep the children at school was given to boys because of the traditional association of

²⁶ Full consideration of the impact of the civil war in Tajikistan is beyond the scope of the current study. For more information on civil war in Tajikistan see for example Clifford et al., (2010), Khushkadamova (2009), Kuvatova (2001) and Roche (2009).

the males as future breadwinners while girls were viewed as future wives. The girls in this study also found secondary education unimportant in comparison to 'home education' where they could master the art of being a perfect Tajik housewife. This view was shared by the school representatives in this study who encouraged the girls to stay at home²⁷. Apart from traditional gendered expectations, devaluation of education is also associated with the lack of employment in the country (UNICEF, 2003).

Marriage patterns

The goal of this section is to analyse the literature on marriage patterns in the post-Soviet Central Asia and Tajikistan. However, as far as I am aware, no study was conducted in the country to explore the issue of marriage age in Tajikistan or the Central Asian region overall. Due to the lack of sources therefore, I am forced to leave the analysis of the marriage age at this point. However, as the phenomenon of child or early marriage is the focus of this thesis, I will return to a detailed analysis of this question later in the empirical chapters.

Changes in the socio-economic and ideological framework of Tajikistan, however, are reported to influence the overall families' practices and decisions. The influence on families is particularly obvious at the times of crisis or insecurity. Roche (2010) points to an interesting observation in marriage patterns among young Tajik men in post-Soviet years. She indicates how young

²⁷ See empirical chapters for more details.

men used various contexts to free themselves from their parents control when it came to the marriage. Thus, she describes, how during the civil war, young men received a sudden opportunity to gain sexual access to women and avoid parental control and costly procedures. (p.284). Families with a daughter, as Roche's analysis goes further, arranged the girls' marriage at an early age and with little financial expenditure for the groom in order to protect them from armed men (Roche, 2010). Roche's work is the only available study that associates early age of marriage with a need to protect the girls at difficult times, something that I argue for in this work. Apart from the civil war, Roche (2010) also demonstrates the loss of parental control over young men in recent years, as migration became popular among this group and they gained financial ability to organize their own weddings.

The economic influence over marriage is noted in several other studies. In Uzbekistan, during the transition period of *perestroika* families choose earlier marriages to demonstrate their wealth, as it was not possible to do earlier during the Soviet period and affirm their Uzbek national identity (Agadjanian and Makarova, 2003). In Tajikistan, marriage and fertility rates declined during the food and draught crisis in 1995 (Clifford et al.). This however, could also be due to non-registration of the marriages and child birth at the period of chaos in the country.

Whether return to pre-Soviet roots or not, such practices as polygamy and bigamy became widespread in recent years. Although bigamy, or women who without divorcing their first husband marry a second husband under Islamic law, might be less common, the practice seemed to emerge in Uzbekistan (Brusina, 2009). At the same time polygamous unions, which are officially

illegal, gained popularity (SADC, 2002). Such practices are common due to the nature of the current state and its failure to ensure the implementation of legislation on the ground, similar to the legislation on minimum marriage age (see section 3.4 below and chapter nine). At the same time, the different types of marriages are possible under the religious ceremony *nikokh*. The prevalence of both unions, bigamy and polygamy, is associated with the socio-economic hardship. There is evidence that due to the lack of other choices a young woman and her family, accepted a marriage proposal from a man who was able to pay the bride price (Brusina, 2009, SADC, 2002). While the socio-economic factor was a reason for an early age of marriage for the girls in this study, it was not so much for the bride price as for the longer economic protection as I will demonstrate in the empirical chapters.

This section demonstrated the socio-economic, religious and political context of Central Asian countries and particularly Tajikistan and its influence on families in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The socio-economic condition worsened in the country, resulting in extreme poverty of the population and creating a 'feminization' of poverty in Tajikistan. At the same time, religion although controlled, gained freedom and practice again. The gender gap in education increased and health care became unaffordable for the majority of Central Asian people but particularly for Tajik women. Similarly, the state rhetoric has been rather confusing in the recent years, sending mixed messages to the families.

Families living under such conditions changed their practices accordingly. Family decisions during this period are thus an excellent example of how traditional view is prone to change depending on the overall socio-economic and political context. Families relied on their cultural and traditional values to survive economically and to socialize children so they grow into proper Tajik individuals. Although the age of marriage is not discussed in the literature, other practices such as religious education, preference for boys over girls when deciding over formal education, polygamy or bigamy were some of the decisions made under the current context. Pressured by the context, families believed educating boys would make a long-term impact on everyone's wellbeing. Preferences were also given to religious education for moral upbringing of both males and females. Girls however, were prepared for their future role of the wives in these lessons, their marriage becoming more important and sometimes ending up in either polygamous or bigamous unions.

3.4 The contradictory messages of the contemporary Tajik state

I base this section on personal observations, which I witnessed during the fieldwork in Tajikistan. These observations are important to share at this point, because they influenced the decisions made by the civil workers and families in this study, which I analyse in chapter nine. This section therefore, will focus on the women's role promoted in recent years and demonstrates the contradictory nature of state messages in the last years. It demonstrates how, on the one hand, the state promotes modernity and demonstrates equality between men and women; while on the other hand, it appears as a guardian of

gender roles promoting motherhood and family values. The impact of these policies and messages on Tajik families will be described separately in chapter nine.

The current state rhetoric on Tajik women's role

Shortly after I arrived in Tajikistan for my field research in spring of 2012, the national holiday, Nawruz was celebrated in the country. Dushanbe, decorated with flowers and big banners with some of the president's speech was ready for the celebration. Along with other decorations however, the images of Tajik girls holding Nawruz's symbol – *sumalak*²⁸ did not pass my attention. The women in the images wore colourful traditional costume, which has been transformed significantly in recent years. Now the women's national costume represented both – a modern fashionable piece and a traditional symbol. The dress itself has become much shorter with a deeper cut at the back and much shorter sleeves. It was accessorized with *toqi* [traditional hat] and very old traditional jewellery. At the same time the national television constantly aired the celebration of Nawruz in the regions, where again a special focus was on the women. Girls and women in the national costume were shown preparing the traditional food, spreading the *dastrakhon* [table cloth] and welcoming guests.

The image of the Tajik woman has become the centre of attention for the state again in recent years. The state's struggle regarding what today's Tajik women should represent is obvious through such visible tools as the national

²⁸ *Sumalak* is a sweet paste made entirely from germinated wheat, which is prepared for Nawruz in a large pot.

clothing and direct messages, or through less visible ways, such as national legislation or practice. All are, however, based on contradictory messages.

First of all, the Tajik state seems to create gender equality in the country and shows a positive intention to modernize and provide socio-economic opportunities for girls. These steps are demonstrated through sets of socio-legal changes. Women, today, are encouraged to enrol at state universities to continue their education along with men. The state adopted the so-called presidential quotas to increase the number of young girls in higher education²⁹. The quotas are distributed to girls particularly from rural areas and from disadvantaged families to enrol at any state higher education institution without exams and free of charge. The women are also encouraged to study well at the Universities of their choice, as those with excellent academic achievement also receive a presidential stipend to cover living expenses.

Moreover, to indicate the equality in the country and create a vision of adopting international standards, the state also passed the legislation on a minimum marriage age, as if to influence the marriage practice in the country. The Soviet Family code was changed in July 2010 that increased the marriage age for both men and women from the age of 17 to the age of 18.³⁰ However, the family code allows a reduction in one year under special circumstances, such as pre-marital pregnancy, if the decision is approved by a court. In accordance with the current code, forced marriage is also banned. Those who break the law will be prosecuted; marriage before the legal age can result in prison sentence of up to six months, while forced marriage can be punished by

²⁹ See Silova and Abdushukurova, 2009 for more on education quotas.

³⁰ Family code of Republic of Tajikistan.

five years' imprisonment. Civil registration of the marriages remained compulsory under this code.

In addition, article 170 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan outlawed other types of unions, such as polygamy. Registration offices as a result could not register marriage with women other than first wife (SADC, 2002). Moreover, the president gave an oral order banning *mullahs* [the religious leaders], to perform *nikokh* if the couple did not have a marriage registration. I will however, return to discussing the implementation and impact of the legislation on the families later in this chapter and in chapter nine.

In theory, therefore, young women are encouraged to get married later, focus on education and gain socio-economic independence, according to the legislation discussed above. However, the Tajik state in recent years has been described as creating a symbolic vision to gain recognition from neighbouring countries and the international community (Heathershaw, 2013). The above mentioned changes in the legislation could easily be interpreted as such. Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) explain the introduction of education quotas in Tajikistan as an attempt to negotiate the global pressure for accepting gender equality. According to the scholars, policy makers in Tajikistan used the 'world culture' rhetoric to reconcile what is expected by the international community on gender equality with local traditions and politics (Silova and Abdushukurova, 2009). As Silova et al., note the number of girls using the education quotas is very low³¹. The state disinterest in promoting education is clear through its other contradictory messages.

³¹ See section 3.3 for the review of scholars work in Tajikistan.

Firstly, there is the issue of Tajik women's clothing. From what I observed during the fieldwork, young girls were not able to literally 'enter' the university premises at times, depending on what they were wearing. The women's clothing was under the surveillance of University staff. The young female students could not enter the premises if they failed to wear high heels, if they wore jeans and other modern clothing, but also if they were 'too religious' and covered their head with a headscarf. I personally observed how some of the female students had to leave the State University because they wore 'inappropriate' clothes.

Moreover, secondary education is not compulsory in the country any longer, as mentioned earlier. As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, due to this legislation, families easily withdrew their daughters from secondary school when they reached adolescence.³² The gap therefore, between those girls who are literate enough to apply for the education quotas and those who stay at school naturally increased due to the policy on secondary education.

Apart from creating obvious barriers, such as clothing to enter the education premises and a choice for the families to withdraw their daughters from school at any time, the state emphasis on the traditional role for the women has been strengthened. Similar to what Marianne Kamp (2005) demonstrates in the case of Uzbekistan, the Tajik state has emphasised the traditional role of the women as mothers in recent years. Whereas in Uzbekistan the state has provided an alternative to the lack of unemployment by paying child allowances for the women to keep them at home (Kamp, 2005), in Tajikistan the allowances are so small they cannot be a motivation to stay at

³² This is also noted by Whitsel, 2011 and UNICEF 2003.

home. For this reason, the state emphasises the traditional role of the women through other means, primarily ideological.

Indeed if I return to the media during the most important holiday in Tajikistan, Nawruz, between the breaks from all the holiday-related shows, a very interesting short video was aired on the national television. The video advert which people referred to as “*reklama*” or a commercial, demonstrated the years of Rakhmon’s presidency in Tajikistan. This short clip showed the president taking an oath at the beginning of his presidency, signing a peace agreement to end the civil war in Tajikistan, then running away from an attempt upon his life, and at the end, receiving a blessing from his mother. Such an interesting choice of events to represent the president can be interpreted in many ways. For me, however, being interested in the gender issues, the video seemed to attempt to give a message about the role of the mother in bringing up the most important men in the country and linking it with his current characteristic as a caregiver of his people and ‘symbol’ of peace in the country.

The symbol of motherhood was further reinforced by the new legislation in early 2011 on “Responsibility of parents for educating and upbringing of their children”³³. According to this legislation, parents are responsible for ‘creating material, financial, spiritual and psychological conditions for educating and upbringing of their children’. In contrast, the state is responsible only for ‘educating, bringing up and protecting orphans and children with disabilities...’ This legislation demonstrates the state’s inability or unwillingness as Manja Stephan (2009) puts it, to take responsibility for educating the future Tajik

³³ Constitution of Republic of Tajikistan, 2011.

generation, leaving the responsibility completely with the parents, particularly mothers. Apart from being unable, the state also demonstrates what it believes the role of the Tajik women is in the current society. Through such laws therefore it strengthens and in a way guards the role of traditional mothers – to bring up and be responsible for their children.

At the same time, the ‘father of the nation’³⁴ emphasises the importance of marriage and the role of the women as wives. Thus for example to ‘assist’ the people, the state issued an order to minimize the expenditure of the wedding celebration.³⁵ The order was followed by a ritual that takes place each year now in Tajikistan, the so called ‘free weddings’. These are initiated by the state where dozens of Tajik young couples are wed at the expense of the state. The idea, according to my interviewees from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, is to assist those in need with the enormous expenses that Tajik weddings are known for, as Roche and Hohmann (2011) demonstrate. Such an attention to the weddings however, only strengthened the traditional role of the marriage for people on the ground, as I will discuss in chapter nine.

Based on personal observations, this section demonstrated the controversial and contradictory nature of state policies and ideologies in contemporary Tajikistan. While the state creates a vision of a modern equal country through encouraging modernized but traditional clothing, creating education quotas and passing legislation to ban early marriage, it also

³⁴ Term borrowed from Akiner, 1997.

³⁵ According to this order, the number of people invited should not exceed 100 people, the bride wealth should not consist of furniture and other luxuries and even the amount of food, namely *plov* should not be more than two cauldrons.

encourages tradition overall and in the traditional role of women in particular through emphasising and even guarding the importance of motherhood and fostering the significance of marriage in Tajik families. I will demonstrate the influence of such mixed messages on the families' decisions in chapter nine.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at Tajik family practices, particularly related to women's status and marriage patterns across three historical eras. These historical times, (a) pre-Soviet, (b) Soviet and (c) years of independence were the focus of this chapter. It demonstrated how the socio-economic, cultural/religious and political changes during each period influenced Central Asian family practices. Factors effecting the age of marriage in other developing countries were discussed in chapter two. This chapter analysed these factors, which are the socio-economic and political realities, in decreasing the age of marriage in the context of Tajikistan.

As it became apparent from this chapter, the culture and tradition of Tajik families were not always the main reason for family choices and marriage preferences that might seem discriminatory towards the women. In chapter two, I demonstrated how Tajik families, and families in similar contexts were described as abusive, violent and dominant towards the children, particularly women. It was thus assumed in the literature that analysed child marriage in the developing world context that there is an association between patriarchal type of families and an early age of marriage. This chapter however aims to demonstrate, that it is not always the case. Although described as patriarchal

throughout the three historical periods, Tajik families changed their preferences in regards to the age of marriage for their daughters in accordance to the socio-economic, cultural/religious and political context of a certain time.

During the pre-Soviet or Russian tsarist period, marriage occurred early for the girls, at the age of nine, according to the literature. What the motive was behind such practice remains unclear. It is however, associated with the tradition and family practices. Families are described as abusive towards the girls at this period and as a result, the women's life was portrayed negatively. However, the primary sources are Soviet studies and their reliability is questionable.

Age of marriage and the overall marriage patterns changed significantly during the Soviet times. Tajik families at this period are described as unwilling to modernize and therefore as still 'patriarchal' and traditional. Nevertheless, due to overall changes in socio-economic life and the attention women received at this period, no matter what the motive of the Soviet state might be, families relaxed their dominance and authority. Although girls were still expected to behave in traditional ways (and in modern ways when engaged in the social life), the compulsory secondary education, availability of jobs (even if low paid), provision of social benefits and improved health care resulted in later marriage. Families did not see the rationale for marrying off the girls as early as it was possible. In fact, the girls were now able to support financially their families and themselves and thus did not need to get married to be under the protection of their husbands.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, in the years known as Independence years, the family practices changed again. Although no previous literature talks about age of marriage in Tajikistan, other family practices, such as domestication of girls, preference for traditional clothing and a headscarf, preference given to boys when deciding about schooling are a clear demonstration of the strengthened traditional values . The authority, described in the literature, however, as I argue in this thesis, is a result of the socio-economic and political context. Tajik families therefore, at least those met during the fieldwork, seemed to be left with no choice but to strengthen their traditional values, such as earlier marriage, in order to give their children the limited opportunities that exist today in Tajikistan.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This chapter presents the research methods used in this study to collect the data. It also explains the reason for choosing a qualitative approach and using a triangulation method for data collection. Apart from the methods, this chapter also gives an insight into the details of how the data was collected during the fieldwork in Tajikistan. It therefore follows the following structure: (1) The first part of the chapter discusses the preliminary details of the study. It looks into the research questions and explains the reason for chosen the qualitative research methods. (2) The following second part then analyses the research methods in details. This part introduces the sample, describes how the research methods were used during the fieldwork, and discusses the experience during data collection in general. (3) The last section looks into other important details, such as the pilot study, research locations, negotiating access and researcher positionality as well as the finding's analysis and limitations of the study.

4.1 Preliminary details

The goal of this study was to identify the causes behind the preference of the families to choose early marriage for their daughters. While it would be interesting to look also at the consequences of such marriage, covering both causes and consequences in a PhD work was deemed impossible and therefore not considered. This study thus focused on collecting data from

various sources to understand why the marriage age for the girls seemed to reduce in recent years. As a result, the research questions, which mainly contained open-ended questions starting with the *why* and *how* questions, were developed and tested during the pilot study. These questions, although they had one goal, were slightly different depending on the sample³⁶. The main questions were developed prior to the study, but as those were open-ended and the aim was to discuss the phenomenon in an informal and causal way, the questions would be sometimes expanded or lessened depending on the situation and willingness of respondents to provide more detail. The study aimed at analysing the phenomenon of early marriage from different angles and thus included both urban and rural areas, men and women, educated professionals working at various organisations and non-educated unemployed people and young and old alike. Moreover, as Tajikistan has been described previously as a patriarchal society³⁷, it was important for the study to get an input from the male respondents, such as brothers and fathers, to analyse the involvement of the men in the arrangement of the marriage.

The research method used in this study to collect data was purely qualitative. Quantitative data collection, which could put the phenomenon of early marriages in the context of Tajikistan into numbers, was out of the scope of this study. As the goal of the current study was to analyse the reasons for early marriage, the qualitative method was identified as a tool for getting more information than would be possible through the quantitative method. Detailed and in-depth information, which could be collected by using the qualitative

³⁶ The research questions are demonstrated in appendix 1.

³⁷ See chapter 2 for discussion of the literature on patriarchy in Tajikistan.

method tools, was therefore the best way to achieve the goal pursued by this study. According to Ambert et.al (1995) qualitative method allows researchers to seek in-depth information about a smaller group of people rather than drawing from a large sample. The aim of qualitative research is also to learn why and how people think and behave in a certain way rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a larger scale (Ambert et al., 1995). As qualitative research has been criticized for its validity (Blaikie 2000 cited in Hemming, 2008) a triangulation method was adopted in this study. It has been argued that triangulation improves the validity of research findings through directing a range of different methods at one problem to check whether or not all the methods returned similar results (Hemming, 2008). Triangulation is defined as 'using multiple methods to view a single object' (Huetttman, 1993, p.42). Huetttman (1993) quotes Yin (1984) that 'any finding or conclusion of a study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information... '(p.42). Therefore, several methods of qualitative data collection were used in this research, including interviews, focus groups and case studies, to get information on the same issues from different perspectives. I describe each of the methods in detail below. The methods were tested first in the pilot study, which will also be described later in this chapter.

4.2 Research methods

This section provides details on both the chosen research methods and the fieldwork experience. Each sub-section therefore consists of the detailed description of the methods and then is followed by notes from the fieldwork

where I describe interaction with people and how the research was implemented.

Sample

In total more than 113 people were interviewed either individually, in focus groups or during family interviews for the purpose of this study (see the table below). As mentioned earlier, three types of data collection methods were chosen: (1) semi-structured interviews with professionals working at different international, national and governmental organizations/institutions; (2) focus groups with women; (3) case studies of brides' families that are in the process of preparing for the wedding. This triangulation method of data collection was chosen to get an in-depth information from multiple sources. These sources are either directly affected by the early marriage (young girls and their families), are external observers (professionals, who often are also parents) or are those who initiate such marriage (older women who are mothers and/or mothers-in-law).

Table 1.1. The main sample of the study

Methods	Number
Professional interviews	20
Focus groups with women consisting of 6-8 people	6 focus groups with the total of 36 women
Family case studies	19 case studies with the total of 57 people

In addition, I collected a small amount of data from court hearings whereby families seek the regional court's permission for a girl to marry earlier than the legal age of 18. The numbers of such hearings, however, are small. Over six months only five families applied for the marriage permission in Dushanbe. I was present at four of these while the last one was cancelled due to the lack of the documents provided by the family.

The interviews were conducted in both Russian and Tajik languages. Russian was preferred by most of the professionals in Dushanbe. Although most of these interviewees were Tajik and therefore spoke Tajik perfectly, they chose Russian as the main language, which according to many in Tajikistan is still associated with modernization. For the professionals therefore, speaking Russian was a way to demonstrate their education and modernity. Tajik, on the other hand, was predominantly spoken by the majority of the Tajik families both in Dushanbe and in rural areas. These were as mentioned earlier traditional families and some of them did not speak Russian at all. Moreover, as the state language is Tajik, it is expected that any written communication, with the state officials, such as obtaining permission or sharing the consent form, should be in Tajik language.

4.2.1 Semi-structured professional interviews

Individual interviews with professionals working at various national and international organizations was a way to answer the questions this study was

interested in, particularly those related to state influence on the age of marriage. Such interviews are described as an 'attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations' and 'where knowledge is constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee' (p. 153 Kvale 1996 in Hemming 2008).

Overall, 20 professional interviews were conducted. These were with people holding various positions at organizations, such as different Ministries in Dushanbe, NGO representatives and community activists, health workers, teachers, workers of ZAGS. As mentioned earlier, the goal of these interviews was to get a response from an external perspective to the question of the causes of the early marriage in the country. In the majority of the cases however, the people interviewed in this sample had children and made a decision in regards to their marriage age at some point. I discuss several such cases in the empirical chapters. These interviews were designed to help in understanding the state influence on the early marriage occurrence in the country and its possible attempts to prevent those. Although semi-structured, the interviews had some guiding questions but were not limited by the questions only. Most of the time it was an informal discussion around the question of early marriage in Tajikistan, which made possible the collection of the information on other aspects, such as personal experience of either being a parent or dealing with the issue on the ground. The interviews usually took place in the offices of the people interviewed. Although most of the professionals did not oppose using a recorder during the interview, others agreed that it puts them under pressure. As a result, in many cases, the tape recorder was not used. I took detailed

notes, however, and if I was not sure about a specific response, the professionals were always available through the phone for confirmation later on.

Notes from the fieldwork

As a result of the pilot study, I contacted most of the professionals through email before leaving for fieldwork to Tajikistan. These were however only those who worked at the state and international organizations and had an access to the Internet. The rest of the professionals, such as teachers, NGO workers in the region and the health workers were contacted later, once in the country, as access to them also required a permission, as I note later. Nevertheless, most of the people I contacted prior to the fieldwork were among the contacts I made during my professional career in the country. I knew these people through the organizations I worked for or through meeting them at various national and international events. Starting the fieldwork was therefore an easy process for me and I started the work the day after arrival to Tajikistan. The professional interviews started immediately. The professionals, in addition, became the source of the first contact for me in the research locations, whether the city, region or village. Prior to traveling outside of Dushanbe, I arranged a meeting with the representative of an NGO or a state organization who not only was the first in the region to be interviewed, but also assisted me in further steps for the research, such as identifying families.

In general, the interviewees discussed the phenomenon in various ways depending on where they worked and what was shared. People from international organizations and some NGOs were mostly open, sincere and

shared any information requested. They did not also mind sharing their names or their positions if I thought necessary. These interviewees were among the few who saw the early girls' marriage as a problem that needs to be addressed. Most of them however, particularly those in Dushanbe, viewed the phenomenon as related to 'Islamisation' of the country, blamed it on the lack of education among parents and usually the backwardness of the regular traditional Tajik families.

The state employers on the other hand, particularly those in the regional offices or the village were cautious. They praised the president at every occasion for providing the girls with every possible opportunity and the families with "everything". Such interviewees denied the existence of early marriage among the families, usually referring to the minimum marriage age legislation, as fundamental in strengthening the rules and separating the 'right' from the 'wrong'. At the same time however, the answers were contradictory as were their own practices, as I show in the empirical chapters. The latter were also difficult to approach in most of the cases. Clearly aware of the hierarchy, they demonstratively refused to talk to me if I did not have a proper 'document' or 'a name' from the above.

4.2.2 Focus groups with women

Focus groups are described by Sim (1996) as advantageous for several reasons: (1) first of all, focus groups are known for their financial benefits, as it is a tool of gathering information from several people as a group at the same time; (2) they are a good source for 'dynamics' of attitudes and opinions during

the interaction that happens between participants; (3) focus groups encourage more spontaneity in the expression of views and provide a safe forum for the view expression, as the respondents do not feel obliged to respond to the questions they would rather avoid (p. 346).

Conducting the focus groups with the women was not part of the plan initially. According to my initial research plan, the focus groups were planned to be conducted at the schools with adolescents who are at the 'nubile age'. The aim was to discuss the current age of marriage for girls in the country and get the young people's perception towards such marriages. Unfortunately, however negotiating access to the schools became impossible, and it took longer time than expected. By the time, I had the permission, the schools were already closed and children were away on the summer school break. Focus groups with women were therefore chosen as an alternative method. This method, although it lacked the involvement of young people, was interesting and rich in its own way.

Six focus groups with women consisting of six to eight people were organized throughout the field research in the three locations identified. The women were chosen based on their age and location. The goal was to group interview older women who are either mother-in-laws or have daughters at the nubile age. The women also lived in the communities where the study was conducted, as it was expected that women from the same location would share similar values and beliefs in regards to the age of marriage.

Organizing these focus groups was not challenging as I choose the time when women were free from domestic work and available for casual chats. This

mixture of mothers and mothers-in-law attracted my attention and became a reason for the focus groups. The goal of these informal discussions was to get a different perspective on the appropriate age of marriage for the females in the country. The idea was to create a positive but vibrant discussion, as I expected mothers to have a different opinion from mother in laws. Another reason for choosing a focus group with the women was due to the level of women's involvement in the process of marriage preparation and marriage partner selection. As I demonstrate in the empirical chapter, it was the women who were responsible for bringing up a 'marriageable' girl and selecting a 'proper' *kelin*.

The focus group discussions were therefore unstructured with open-ended questions and in an informal setting. The discussions usually took from one to two hours. Although video or audio recording is suggested during the focus groups (Quible, 1998), it is not always considered culturally appropriate (Sim, 1996). In my case therefore using a voice recorder was not always accepted by the respondents. Capturing the information during the focus group and moderating the discussion was as a result very challenging. Thus, after analysing the information, to confirm some of the notes, which appeared confusing, I approached several focus group members individually later during the fieldwork.

Notes from the fieldwork

The women I met for the focus groups, as mentioned above were from the same location or neighbourhood and therefore knew each other well. This

fact, although helped me significantly, at times made the focus discussions almost unmanageable. Nevertheless, the women very helpful in organizing the focus group discussions. Thus, for example, my first focus group was conducted in Dushanbe in '*bazarchik*', a small local marketplace. In the village, Safedorak, the first focus group was organized by my hostess, a secondary school head teacher, whom I call Nazokat in this thesis. Nazokat gathered her neighbours, friends and relatives the first night I stayed at her house to 'chat' about the marriage age.

The mixture of the focus group participants created interesting discussion. Some women were older and thus 'respected' by everyone else in the group, so these dominated the discussions most of the time. They spoke openly, criticizing other women's daughters or their methods of 'bringing up' the girls, supporting other women, particularly the mothers-in-law and so on. The younger women, usually in their 40s or 50s, listened to the elder's women opinion and nodded in agreement. While such elder women were a great source of information, as they apparently did not feel constrained, they also dominated discussions. Additionally women in this age were sometimes both mothers of the married girls or the girls getting married, and mothers-in-law. Thus, they had an opinion in both matters. Nevertheless, it was important to 'hear' the younger women as well and sometimes I directed my question to certain members of the group to ensure they were involved.

In general, the focus group discussions were a great source of information, rich in details. Discussions usually became part of sharing a 'gossip' and most of the members had similar opinions, although conflicts were unavoidable. It was particularly so if the members of the focus group supported

different families – thus one person would support the family where the girl came from, while the other one supported the family where she married.

Women in these groups were thus interested in the topic of marriage by itself and welcomed the discussion. In these focus groups I learned about specific families' problems, such as whose daughter did not get a marriage proposal and why or whose daughter is getting more marriage proposals. It is also in the focus groups where I met most of the mothers-in-law and learned about their role in finding an 'appropriate bride' and their criteria for classifying girls into 'appropriate and desired' and 'unwanted' *kelins*.. It was interesting however, to work out the men's involvement as well. As a result, I intentionally choose to have men in the case study interviews, which I describe below.

4.2.3 Marriage case studies

A case study is defined in the literature as '...a method of obtaining a "case" or a number of "cases" through an empirical examination of a real-world phenomenon within its naturally occurring context, without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context' (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999, p. 372). Case studies are also described as providing 'dense information' through 'thick description' (Crasnow, 2012, p. 657). With this particular aim, to gather information that is rich in its context and provides not only specific answers but also demonstrates the complexity of interrelationships, which this study was

interested in exploring, the case study method was chosen as the third method in triangulation.

Over 19 case studies were recorded during the field research in Tajikistan. To minimize variability, all of the families chosen for the case studies had several similarities. These were traditional Tajik families whose daughter of nubile age received a marriage proposal and who were in the process of preparing for the wedding. Although I had an opportunity to communicate with several grooms' families, the focus was on the girls' marriage age and therefore cases selected for this study consisted mostly of the brides' families. I, nevertheless, indicate in the empirical chapters the information I received from the grooms' families where necessary. However, the 19 cases that I mention here are only those with similar characteristics, such as having a girl of marriageable age.

Effective case studies are described as having a variety of techniques for extracting data (Yin, 1994). The aim of the case studies in this particular research was, therefore, to understand the marriage patterns within the families through in-depth observation and interview. The case studies made it possible to observe the complex interrelationship among the family members that I describe in the empirical chapters. Moreover, the case studies gave a great opportunity to observe the young girls' reactions through everyday interactions, as during the interviews, the conversation was dominated by other family members. The case studies also were a good tool for interviewing all the family members involved in the marriage arrangement and preparation. Therefore, when discussing the marriage age, family members, such as the bride and their parents were invited. Sometimes I had to come back to the same family several

times to ensure that all the family members I wanted to speak to in a group were available. As Tajikistan is described as patriarchal society (Harris, 2004, Poliakov, 1992) understanding the men's view on the appropriate age of marriage for the women was important for this study. Therefore in each family I identified a man that had a decision making power, whether it was a grandfather, a father, or an older brother. As a result, the men were involved in every family case study. Usually it was the father of the bride but in several occasions, it was an older brother who replaced his father, either because the former was dead, ill or in one case in prison. The brother however, as the oldest man in the family, usually had decision-making power and therefore had his own say in arranging the marriage for his sister.

Notes from fieldwork

Identifying the families was more challenging than the professionals or women for the focus groups. Fortunately, a wedding is an event in Tajikistan that does not lack public attention. Thus if someone has a wedding, the neighbours, the shopkeepers in that area and even people at the local *bazarchik* would be aware of it.

In Dushanbe, identifying the families was easiest due to circumstances that allowed me to meet my neighbours who later became my unofficial assistants. Such introductions happened soon after I arrived in Dushanbe. I rented a flat in the city, which was located not far from the centre, but was also

close to the “village”³⁸ nearby. Although neighbours in Dushanbe are usually quite close and spend a significant time with each other, in my case being a new person in the building, it would have probably been different if not for the given circumstances. The next day after my daughter and I arrived in Dushanbe, we found ourselves in the condition I most feared when we planned this trip. Even though it was the middle of March and the city was getting ready for the biggest national celebration of *Nawruz*, it was heavily snowing. The next day after our arrival, my daughter and I woke up in a cold flat with no electricity. It was a power cut associated with the “unexpected weather conditions” as someone explained later. My 3 years old daughter however did not care – she demanded her breakfast. After battling with myself for a long time, I was forced to knock on the neighbour’s door and ask for assistance. The enforced introduction soon turned out to be very productive for the research purposes.

The neighbours learned about my research interest and introduced me to people at the local *bazarchik*, who were the centre of all the news in the neighbourhood. Very soon, I had a list of the families that had a wedding coming up and those included not only the families in the neighbourhood but also in the nearby “village”. It was also in the same *bazarchik* where my first focus group with women took place, as I described earlier.

While in the city, although my encounter with the “right” neighbours made finding the families easy, I was nervous about identifying families in the other two locations, the town and the village. The town Varzob is about 25 km north of Dushanbe. As it is not far, I travelled to Varzob and back almost every day,

³⁸ Although it was not a village and was part of Dushanbe, it was still called “a village” by everyone due to the people’s lifestyle.

using the mini buses and private taxis. Before travelling to Varzob, I contacted an NGO whose contact number was given by one of the International Organizations. Therefore, I had a place to go to in Varzob during my first visit. The staff of the NGO were very helpful. Not only did they speak to me for hours about the early marriage situation in Varzob, but also they kindly introduced me to the local *Hukumat* representative whom I had to meet before starting the research in the region (the importance of hierarchy was noted earlier). I was then taken to the local health centre where the NGO representatives and the medical staff members made several phone calls to help me identify the families that were preparing for the upcoming weddings of their daughters.

The NGO workers from Varzob also assisted me in finding the focal person in the village Safedorak, where I would travel next. The director of the NGO had a relative working as a teacher at the village school. It was this teacher that I ended up living with in the village. I could not travel back to Dushanbe any longer due to the distance but also, as mentioned earlier, evenings were the best times to gather the whole family for discussions and meet the women for the focus groups.

The case study observations was the source that provided the most insight for the thesis. At some point during the observation, I also interviewed the family members, usually consisting of (1) a mother, (2) male member, either father or a brother and (3) the girl who was getting married. The focus groups were conducted among the women separately as I expected the case study

interviews to be dominated by men. These, however, were different from what I expected.

First, at the very beginning, the case study interview was the main way of gathering the perspectives of the girls. The girls were not interviewed separately for two main reasons. Firstly, speaking to the girls privately was not considered due to potentially sensitive subject of the topic. To avoid misunderstandings about what was being discussed with the girls regarding marriage and the groom, this study did not seek such a possibility. Secondly, as Tajik families live in collective type of the families, speaking to the girls without other family members was not naturally possible. The young brides however, were usually quiet during the case study interviews. This lack of conversation with the girls, as I noted previously was a frustrating experience at first. Later, however, I realised that, in the majority of the cases, the observation of the girls in their daily lives, their engagement with their siblings and friends and their daily chores, as well as informal conversations or 'chats' still provided the data I was interested in. Thus, although this study could benefit from a separate interview with the brides, it did not lack the information I was after.

Moreover, the girls were expected to be 'shy' in the presence of their fathers or brothers as marriage is considered a time when the girls would be involved with the other man and become sexually active. Shyness was therefore an attribute of a bride. Thus, for example, one of the girls seemed excited about her upcoming marriage and encouraged by her mother, she started showing me her bridal 'possessions'. The moment her father entered the room, she and her mother both became very nervous and hid the things where possible. As her mother later said, "it was such an embarrassing moment".

Another interesting observation during these interviews was the limited involvement of the men. In most of the cases, the women talked predominantly, only confirming some of the details with the men. In other cases, the men talked but they were constantly corrected by the women. Surprisingly, the brothers, if they were part of the interview, had more information than the fathers. As I demonstrate in the empirical chapters, the father figure was mostly absent in the girls upbringing and was consulted only when the situation was out of control. The interviews were therefore not controlled by the men as initially expected.

Data analysis

The data collected during the interviews or focus groups were translated into English immediately or within a few days. Translating them and going over the interviews once again was a useful way to reflect on my own work. Therefore, if I noticed that I missed a point, I would make sure to get that information next time. In addition, it was an opportunity to get back to the respondents to verify the information and confirm few questions that could sometimes remain unclear. The diary I used during the fieldwork not only included the interviews that the participants were unwilling to record, but also my own observations and reactions to certain responses. Such records helped reflect on my own emotions and assisted me in realizing and dealing with my own biases.

Once the data collection was over and I returned to the UK, all the data was entered into computer software Nvivo to analyse it. Each of the interviews,

discussions and observations were coded accordingly line by line and were divided into categories to indicate the relationship between the concepts. Such analysis is also known as microscopic, which according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) allows the researchers to understand the data through getting out of the usual way of thinking and letting the data to speak. The microscopic analysis not only forces the researchers to listen closely to *what* the interviewees said but also *how* they are saying it (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This type of analysis therefore helped me to understand not just the meaning of what the participants in this study said but also their own reaction to it, through interpreting their nonverbal communication.

4.3 Pilot study

In the summer of 2011, I arrived in Tajikistan for the pilot study. The goal of the pilot study was to test the research questions and identify potential difficulties that might arise during the actual fieldwork. The pilot study was also to test the methods of identifying and organizing the focus groups and family interviews. Although I was always interested in choosing different locations, during this period, I mostly stayed in Dushanbe where I intended to interview a few families and some of the professionals. During the pilot study, I had an opportunity to interview five professionals from various organizations and four families that were in preparation of their daughters' wedding.

The pilot study revealed several faults with the chosen research methods. Most of my time during these short three months of the summer was spent in arranging the meetings with the professionals. As it was summer time,

most of the professionals I was interested in interviewing were out of the office on holidays. The first lesson learned during the pilot study therefore was to arrange the meetings where possible before arriving in Tajikistan for the main research. Another problem was with the overall approach to the families. In all four families I met during the pilot research, the interviews were conducted with the women only, with the mothers and the brides. However, engaging the males in the discussion was important, because the study was interested in the causes of early marriage, and it was anticipated that men, such as brothers and fathers, could be the main initiators of such arrangements. Consequently, I adapted my methods from only interviewing the families to case studies with interviews and observations. I expected that the case studies would allow me to stay in the same location longer and be more flexible around the times when all the family members were available.

The last goal therefore before returning to the UK from the pilot study was to choose locations for the research and possibly arrange the stay for the fieldwork. As I was interested in comparing the results by locations, I chose Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, for the urban area and Gharm town, a district in Rasht valley of central Tajikistan, for the rural area. The chosen district however, was not approved by many people I met. Gharm district is known in the country for its religious extremism and it was even identified as the '*mujohids*' location during the civil war in 1992. Several state employers that I spoke to were convinced that I would find more cases of early female marriage in Gharm than anywhere else in Tajikistan, but believed I should select another area. According to some professionals, if I wanted to include the Tajik men's opinion in the study, I might not get such opportunity if I went to Gharm. It was

anticipated that it would be impossible to speak to the Gharmi men because they could find it inappropriate for a young woman travelling alone to speak to the opposite sex. While it could be different for a foreign female researcher, for me as a Tajik, such actions could be interpreted negatively. As a result by the end of the pilot study the locations for the study were selected: (1) Dushanbe (the capital of Tajikistan) as an urban area; (2) district Varzob, situated north of Dushanbe and as one of the regions of Republican subordination, where I later identified the town Varzob as mixture of urban/rural location; (3) Safedorak, a village in this same region, as a rural area. I will now focus more on the locations in the following section.

4.4 Study locations

Three different locations were chosen for the study, as mentioned above: a) Dushanbe city as an urban area, b) Varzob town that has both mixtures of urban and rural lifestyles and c) Safedorak village as a purely rural setting. Such selection was made with the aim of comparing whether the preference for the younger age of marriage differs per location in Tajikistan. It was also interesting to analyse how such preferences could change from an urban area to a semi-urban/semi-rural area and to a traditional village remote from urban influence. In this way, I hoped to see how the prevalence of urbanization versus tradition influenced families' decisions. It should be mentioned however, that Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, chosen as the urban area for this study is not as urbanized and modernized as it usually is expected with capital cities.

Dushanbe, according to many respondents of this study, was never fully urbanized even during the Soviet Union period. The construction of modern multi-floor apartment houses, tea houses, movie theatres, opera and ballet theatre, parks and other public places that represented modernity were mainly focused in the centre of the city, while the outskirts were left untouched. The public transport, buses and trolley buses were designed to run only through the main roads, hiding the so-called “village” part of the city. Therefore those who had lived in the city for years, were shocked to see the outskirts of the city for the first time, when the public transportation, before consisting of only buses and trolleybuses became dominated by mini buses ‘*marshrutka*’ that use various routes through the “villages” to have a shorter and therefore cheaper run. Moreover, in the recent years, the city has been populated by the internal migration of Tajik families moving from rural areas to the only “big” city, Dushanbe, in search of jobs. The only urbanized area in Dushanbe has always been the centre of the city, where most of the Soviet era elites live even today. For the purpose of this study however, it was decided to focus on the outskirts of the city, where regular Tajik families lived, similar to those which could be easily identified in other areas.

When choosing the locations for this study, it was also important to take into account the differences of the regions in Tajikistan. The four main regions in the country vary from each other by the level of religiosity, education, domestic everyday rituals and even the dialects used by people belonging to one or another region. This regional segregation can be sensed at every level of the society where people identify each other as ‘us’ coming from one region and ‘they’ people from other regions (also noted by Harris, 2004). This segregation

has both political and cultural segments. According to Harris (2004), when Tajikistan became a separate republic within Soviet Union in 1929³⁹, the 'concept of Tajik nationality' (p.28) created by Stalin was never accepted by people. Indeed, up to the present days, Tajik people identify themselves by the region they come from, as Pamiri (Pamir eastern region of Tajikistan) or Garmi (area of Central Tajikistan) and so on. Tadjbakhsh (cited by Harris, 2004) mentions the difference in regional favouritism during the Soviet Union which became one of the reasons for the civil war to take a regional character in 1992. Even during selection of a marriage partner for their children, Tajik families preferred to choose brides and grooms from the same region as they come from, as I demonstrate in the empirical chapters and as also noted by Tett (1996). As a result, it was decided to select the three different locations for this study in one region to have a sample with the similar values, practices and beliefs. Choosing urban or semi-urban/semi-rural areas in various regions would possibly result in completely different findings. Therefore, even though, some differences are expected, as the locations vary from urban to rural, at least those would be within the same region and thus reduce variability and therefore result in valid findings. Hence, this study does not claim to represent the marriage practices of the whole country and rather has the modest goal of analysing early marriages in the context of Tajikistan from the perspective of a single region.

³⁹ Before 1929, Tajikistan was part of Uzbekistan. I briefly mention the nationality construction in chapter 2,

4.5 Negotiating access

Tajikistan is a country where hierarchy is still significant. Whether it is due to Soviet history or the patriarchal structure, not only age and gender give individuals status, but also their position in the working environment. Thus, it was not only the older men and women that have an authority in a Tajik community but also different directors, managers and other bosses who are in an “always right” position. Although it is possible to see women at the managerial positions in Tajikistan, those are limited in the governmental institutions and are rather a phenomenon of international organizations. The head of a company or organization therefore, usually a male, is similar to a father figure who expects subordination and respect from the people working with him or “under” him.

Therefore, to implement successfully a project or a study it is crucial to follow the hierarchy. Failure to do so could have several consequences. First of all not following the hierarchy and failing to pay a visit to the person at the top, even if to only introduce yourself, would be a clear indication of disrespect. Second and most importantly, people in the lower positions would possibly be less cooperative if one does not have a supporting letter or mentioning the right name from above. All the organizations that work today in Tajikistan whether international or local NGOs have learned this and established good working contacts with the official people and stakeholders, whether it is a health worker, head teacher of a school, religious leader or even the representative of local the *hukumat* [government].

Consequently, for the majority of the interviews with the governmental organizations, school directors or health workers, permission was required from

the higher rank, usually the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health. Organizing meetings with the representatives of international organizations and NGOs was easier, as it could usually be arranged by phone.

The same was true with regard to the families. Prior to contacting the families, I was instructed to gain permission from a certain governmental institution. I was very lucky to know the structure in Tajikistan and the way it works, as a result of my professional career in the country prior to starting a PhD. Therefore, I sent a required letter requesting permission for conducting the research prior to the field trip. However, when I arrived in Tajikistan, I still had to wait a couple of weeks before my letter was found and permission was granted. Nevertheless, the permission seemed to be only for bureaucratic purposes, as it was not checked during the fieldwork, neither did it assist in any ways.

4.6 Anonymity, confidentiality and protection of participants

According to academic ethical standards, I developed copies of written consent in simple Tajik language, explaining the nature of the study, what participation in the study involved, and the way it guaranteed the rights, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The ethical standards however are universal and not culturally specific. They require a researcher to develop and use such resources as a written consent and do not allow flexibility in conducting the data collection that would make sense in a particular environment. As I describe in this section, the written consent as the

requirement expected by the ethical standards was a tool that created problems for my research rather than assisted me.

The written consents were read and signed during the professional interviews without any issues. This consent however, in the majority of the meetings with the women for the focus groups and with the families for the case study became a source of frustration for me. In almost all of the cases, nobody was willing to read the consent even though it was a relatively short letter in a simple Tajik language. As a result, I ended up reading the form myself passing it afterwards to each participant for a signature. While most of the families signed it without questioning, most of the focus group participants perceived the consent form as a joke, which did not deserve their attention. They would laugh at the consent or at each other's signature and would even encourage each other to sign it for them. The fact that the consent was not taken seriously worried me, as I wanted to guarantee their voluntary participation, necessary for the research ethics. I therefore ended up spending more time explaining the importance of the document for my research and requesting each participant individually to sign the consent form, before the discussion could start. Although after hours of negotiation, the consent forms were signed, accordingly I found such practice irrelevant in a Tajik context. Perhaps the oral consent would work better in such an environment. However, I did not consider it, as I was worried that the oral consent might not be within the ethical standards and my research could be invalidated.

Every effort was taken to minimize the risk of any harm for participants by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The majority of the respondents preferred to stay anonymous. As a result, such identifiable information as

names or address were never asked to ensure that participants felt secure and confident. Nevertheless for clarity reasons I give the people interviewed for this study pseudonyms. At the same time, respondents from various organizations, particularly state institutions and NGOs also requested not mentioning their names or the name of their organization in this thesis. For this reason, I avoid naming any organization here, whether state or international organization, an NGO or health clinic and school.

4.7 Researcher positionality

Researcher position is recognized widely in the literature. The positionality of a researcher has been discussed from the perspective of an 'outsider', when researching in a foreign culture (Boddy, 2014, Malam, 2004, Ryan et al., 2011, Milgram, 2012) and the 'insider' when research is conducted in a native culture or country (Abu-Lughod, 1999, Alcalde, 2007, Ryan et al., 2011, Shubhangi, 2010, Sirnate, 2014). In this section, I would like to discuss my positionality as a researcher going back home to conduct this study. As this section will demonstrate being a Tajik and sharing the same values as the study respondents had its positive and negative sides.

According to Wolfe (1996), one's position in the field is identified within the social hierarchy vis-à-vis other groups and individuals with regard to class, gender, ethnicity and race, each of which limits or broadens researcher understanding of others. Such 'embodied subjectivity' determines how comprehensively the researchers can understand the local phenomena (p.13-14, Wolfe 1996). Indeed, my position depended on how I was perceived by the

respondents of this study. Certain characteristics of my status, such as being a Tajik female, married with a child and western education were emphasized at times depending on which characteristic was more important to one or the other respondent.

At the same time, I struggled with the personal tension I felt throughout the study that influenced my stay in the field and possibly the approach I used during the interviews, focus groups and case studies. Similar to the feelings Leila Abu-Lughod (1999) describes, I found myself under the patriarchal influence once again, which I thought I dealt with years ago. I came back to Tajikistan and to Tajik patriarchy after spending several years abroad, which I thought, had changed my perception as a female. Moreover, my husband who is a Tajik, fortunately for me, does not recognize the patriarchy and believes in reciprocity in marital relations. Living a 'free' life therefore where I could speak up when I wanted to and make certain decisions, I believed that I as a woman born and raised in a patriarchal society have long dealt with the feelings of being a female in a Tajik society. Interestingly though I was back to who I used to be in a relatively short period. Although I chose to adopt again many characteristics of a Tajik woman to make the research process easier, such as the traditional dress or indication of respect by putting my right hand to my heart, or referring to people *akka* [brother] and *appa* [sister], other characteristics came back unintentionally and perhaps even unconsciously. Thus, I felt paralyzed and unable to speak in front of some men, particularly those holding higher social status, felt shy and restrictive in my actions and manner of conversation.

This position of a Tajik woman, as a result had positive and negative influence on my overall research, apart from the personal struggle. One positive side of me being a Tajik was my familiarity with the hierarchy in Tajikistan. Knowing how things worked helped me in arranging meetings and organizing focus groups. However, some of the respondents particularly those working in different agencies, were used to foreign researchers, and although at first I was interesting to them as a Tajik woman “doing the work of the westerners” very soon they lost interest in me. I once was even introduced as a Tajik, born and raised in the west, as the association of being only a Tajik and yet travelling to the regions all by myself was incomprehensible to some of the respondents. The attitude in the country toward foreigners at the same time is different from what I as a native person received. Tajik culture is known for its hospitality and is usually very open to western researchers and other ‘guests’. My position therefore as a native Tajik person translated as someone who wants to “look like” a foreigner, was not welcomed by many. Nevertheless, being an ‘insider’ and sharing the same beliefs helped me to get closer to the respondents of this study. Thus sometimes I could understand what was happening in a family by only observing a particular scene, while for an ‘outsider’ most of the observed scenes would not make sense. At the same time, most of the respondents were disappointed that I was not a foreigner and thus could not assist financially (foreigners are believed to be financially advantageous in the country), but they felt they did not have to worry about being ‘judged’ either. Moreover, I think understanding the culture and therefore certain practices, I was less prone to making conclusions or interpret the findings that were far from the reality.

I had an interesting experience with the women. Not once, I was lectured on my position as a wife and a mother. The women tried to persuade me to leave the research for “others” and mind my “own business”, taking care of my husband and daughter. I was also judged for spending nights at “strangers” houses, where I was hosted, which apparently questioned my loyalty to my husband. Most of the women, particularly in the rural area, were sure “my adventure would not end up positively for me” and it will definitely influence my relationship with my husband. Apart from being judged however, I was perceived positively by the women, particularly because I shared similar identities with them.

Growing up in the shared culture, I felt the patriarchy of each household and could relate to it and often even involuntarily became subject to it. Although I was probably raised in a less patriarchal family than families I met during the fieldwork, in order to gain trust and to relate to the stories the women told me, I shared my own experiences when similar to those the other women experienced. Like many young women I met during the fieldwork, my own actions and behaviour were also policed by my male relatives and I was still not allowed to wear certain clothes when visiting my home town. Like other women in the field, I returned to some traditional behaviour. I would get up along with other younger girls to my feet when an older man or woman entered the room; offered tea and sometimes even made one for those who visited the family hosting me; did not dare to make eye contact with the male respondents; and behaved in the ‘expected manner’ of a ‘shy and polite’ Tajik woman. All these similarities allowed me to become closer to the families that I chose for case studies and were approved by the women during the focus groups.

Similarly, as a typical Tajik woman I was treated differently by the male respondents. The men were less judgmental of my position as a researcher. It was difficult to surprise the men working at particular institutions in the urban area for example (the same goes for the females), as those are quite used to seeing a less 'traditional' female who works in the office and regularly attends meetings with them. Although disappointed by my research interest, as '*non-political*' and '*another topic about male-female equality*' I was successful in meeting with the male professionals. The regular, traditional Tajik men from the families, however, were less open. The younger men were curious about me as a Tajik woman hanging around asking questions. The older ones however, would often create a vision of being "extremely busy" and therefore unavailable for the conversation. Mixed with my own tensions of 'feeling the patriarchy' arranging interviews with the men in Varzob and Safedorak was a rather upsetting experience. While with the younger men the conversation would flow easily, with those older I could not force myself be more persistent with and at times felt suppressed. Not being able to convince the men, I had to "hunt" them and come back several times a day in order to be able to speak with the families as a whole. I was playing around their schedule which most of them seemed to create just to avoid discussing the marriage questions with me. The women were sure it would have been different if it was a foreign woman who according to them are more "pushy".

In any case, my own position influenced my research experience throughout the months spent in the country doing the fieldwork. It has also influenced my own reflection on the study and possibly some of the research findings. I tried to stay neutral to the questions discussed and stories told in

most of the cases but I do not deny feeling certain ways towards the women and families I have met during the fieldwork. Perhaps, exactly because I was a Tajik woman myself from a family with somewhat similar issues, I was emotionally effected and touched by many families I visited. Particularly it was difficult for me to see the living conditions of the majority of the families and the extreme poverty and everyday struggle my native Tajiks went through. I found myself spending personal money buying certain food products for the families I lived with throughout my stay in the field. Moreover, at times I could not stop myself from sharing the pain a particular family was going through and found myself in tears. At times with the issues the families had to deal with, my interest in marriage practices seemed pointless to me. I often persuaded myself that I am making a difference to this community through my research by bringing up the questions previously not discussed. I tried to stay positive that my research findings would attract more attention to the problems the families have and to the lack of opportunities for the women, which puts a pressure on the poor families to choose an early marriage for their daughters.

Researcher positionality is not only important but also useful to recognize, as this small section demonstrated. Through reflecting on my own position as a native Tajik and a female married researcher, I experienced positive and negative emotions, relationships with respondents and a certain attitude that could not leave this study without a particular effect.

4.8 Study limitations

This research on analysing the issue of marriage age for females and understanding the reasons for early marriage in Tajikistan is the first to tackle the phenomenon. I will return to the study implications later in the thesis. At this point however, I would like to point to the study limitations, because as with any research, this one is not free from limitations either. I recognized several limitations in this study, which could have resulted in different research findings if implemented.

The first limitation faced by the study was the difficulty in speaking to the young girls privately without the presence of their parents or other adults. As Tajik families are collective by nature and privacy is usually not sought by its members, talking to the young girls without anyone else's presence was not possible first of all because of this particular cultural norm. Besides, the interviews with the families were part of the case studies that also involved participant observations and thus longer involvement with the families. Seeking a private conversation with the girls could result in breaking the trustful relationship with the families and could therefore obstruct further interactions. Nevertheless, I believe, if I had spoken to the girls in private, more light could be shed into the question of appropriate marriage in their views and on male-female dynamics in general. It was particularly interesting to understand the perception of the girls as teenagers towards such questions as love and passion that possibly concerned them specifically due to their age. Along with the first one, a question this study did not cover is their personal expectations or aspirations from the arranged marriage. Although this study describes the view

expressed by family members including the young brides that marriage is the only way to ensure socio-economic security, understanding the personal expectations of the young brides would only enrich the study findings.

Even though out of the scope of this particular research, the study would benefit from statistical data on the prevalence of marriage age for girls in the country, which is the second limitation of the study. The official statistics do not include marriages below the legal age and only indicate the number of marriages that are officially registered. As early marriage is below the legal age, such cases are not documented. The lack of such information was felt throughout the study. Having a specific number in mind could help to promote discussion with some people particularly at the state institutions, who believed the issue of early marriage was not a problem in Tajikistan. Realization of the phenomenon of early marriage and therefore possibly prioritizing the problem in the country, could probably make the research easier at the same time. Thus, equipped with the statistical data, organizing the focus groups at the schools, which was part of the research method but then later abandoned, as I mentioned earlier, could have been promoted. The future studies therefore, should conduct a representative quantitative analysis of the age of marriage for girls in the country.

Conclusion

This chapter was written to present the research methods used in this study to collect the data. As it described, the method used for data collection was qualitative consisting of three separate methods or triangulation for validity

reasons. The triangulation method included: (1) semi-structured individual interviews with professionals working at various national and international organizations; (2) focus group discussions with women; (3) and family case studies.

The qualitative method chosen for this study was identified as the best tool for collecting data on the reasons for the preference of early marriage for young Tajik girls. It was through the qualitative data that in-depth and thorough understanding of the issue became possible, where not only the participants were able to answer specific questions, but could also share their own experiences as was the case with professionals, or engage in argument with each other demonstrating various points on the same issue, as was the case with focus groups. Moreover, the qualitative method, such as case studies, provided not only the overall perception of the families towards the appropriate age of marriage for the girls, but also became a source of rich data through observing every daily interactions between males and females and particularly attitudes towards the young brides. The observation also made it possible to look into the brides' side of the 'story' without compromising their safety or crossing the ethical framework. It is due to the qualitative method therefore chosen in this study that the findings became interesting as I demonstrate in the empirical chapters. The qualitative method allowed the participants to actually participate in this study, through the multiple quotes that I bring from the fieldwork. I would consider including quantitative methods in this study to get statistical data on the preferred age of marriage for the girls, for the reasons explained earlier. Nevertheless, at this point I believe the qualitative method was the best fit to answer the questions raised by this particular study.

Chapter 5

‘Girls are temporary guests in their home’. The marriage window.

“When the girl is not a child any more, she has to get married. If Sayora doesn’t get married what will happen to her tomorrow? Her dad and I will not be around forever to look after her... who will feed her? With this marriage of hers I feel as if a heavy stone is lifted from my shoulders. She will have her own family and her husband to look after her... that is what husbands are for...”⁴⁰

The marriage market starts early for the girls in Tajikistan. Girls in this particular study entered the marriage market at the age of 15 and were expected to be married by the age of 19. From the 19 case studies observed during the fieldwork, 17 girls were getting married within this age frame; 12 of those married at the age of 16, thus making this age the most common. This is however not to claim that girls above this age did not get married at all, as I met a few families during my research with older daughters (20-21 years) being married. But as the girls, similar to Sayora, grow out of the marriage market, which is within a very short window frame, their chances of finding a ‘decent’ husband decreases and with that their perspective for a secure future as a mother and a wife.

This chapter has an important goal as it serves as an introduction into the current study. The chapter is structured in the following order: (1) First, I demonstrate the concept of marriage inevitability in Tajikistan and discuss the

⁴⁰ Mother, case study, Dushanbe.

importance of marriage for Tajiks. (2) Next, to understand why families view marriage as security for their daughters, I analyse the 'ideal marriage' type that parents have in mind when arranging the girls' marriage. (3) The next three sections will discuss marriage age in more details. I analyse the appropriate age of marriage according to the respondents of this study. Next, the causes of early marriage will be discussed in more details. The last section will then demonstrate the pressure on the families and the girls and will explain 'the danger' of falling out of the marriage window. (4) As I argue in this chapter, early marriage is chosen to protect the girls and it is therefore guided by the feelings of love and affection. Thus, section 5.6 defines such terms as love, affection and 'destiny' and how they are used in this thesis. (4) Lastly, the different types of marriages observed during the fieldwork will be analysed.

5.1 Inevitability of marriage

Tajik women are expected to leave their parental home eventually and become a member of another family as the title of this chapter demonstrates. The importance of marriage was emphasized constantly during the fieldwork. All the respondents in this study whether men, women, an educated or uneducated person agreed that marriage is a duty of each Muslim and therefore a Tajik individual. It is a parents' responsibility to ensure children, are married in time and produce the next generation. According to families interviewed for this study, the main and most important purpose of marriage is to bear children. Even though Tajik families are naturally big with many children, (sometimes up to nine children or more per couple) a new *kelin* is under pressure to prove her

fertility and have her first child as soon as possible. Anxiety around conceiving a child in the first year of marriage is consequently very common; young people fear the possibility of not being able to conceive while older people worry about not becoming grandparents. Although this research did not focus on the married women and was rather interested in those who were only getting married, I came across a few young girls whose marriage broke up within a year or two as a result of not being able to conceive a child.

Marriage or the creation of a new family is an unavoidable destination for both men and women. For men it is a passage from youth to adulthood and therefore is a way of domesticating the 'wild' young men as Roche (2010) indicates in her study. Similar to Roche's findings (2010), I came across families that were desperate to have their sons, who had a drug or alcohol addiction, married. These families strongly believed that as a man, once married their son will realise the responsibility for his family and will be forced to make decisions accordingly. Also as Roche (2010), I interviewed families where a son came back to Tajikistan from Russia to quickly marry a Tajik girl and return to his Russian 'wife'. In any case, while Tajik men gets married to form a new family, their duty also includes taking care of their parents. Consequently, a Tajik man, usually the youngest son, stays in his parental home after the marriage to look after his parents as they age⁴¹. However, it is not the son who provides care for his parent on a daily basis. Men's main role is to work and financially support his family. This gendered responsibility has forced young Tajik men, in recent years, to leave the country in big numbers as migrants to work in neighbouring

⁴¹ This shared responsibility is also noted by Roche (2010). Roche demonstrates how parent-child relationship works in Tajikistan through, what she calls "sacred" connection (p.131).

countries, such as Russia, leaving their wives as the main carer of their parents (Olimova and Bosc, 2003). Nevertheless, although it is important for men along with other gender related expectations to get married, they have an option to explore other opportunities before getting married. Most young men finish school (unlike many girls met during fieldwork) and they could then continue their education at the local universities, find employment or even leave the country, as indicated above. The scenario is different for most of the traditional women⁴².

In contrast to boys, the majority of young girls stay with their parents-in-laws after the marriage. They are therefore expected to leave their own house at some point but for most, it is only one way, through the marriage. Marriage was closely associated with the girls' future, which is best described by the following quotes:

"...our daughters are temporary guests in the house and they will soon have to leave. This is the way it is, we bring them up, teach them a few things and then let them go and become a daughter for another family..."

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"...if she (the daughter) does not get married what would we do with her? She is not a log I can use to build a house!" ⁴⁴

⁴² A very small percentage of young females today are becoming more financially independent through finding employment at various national and international organizations. I will return to these females in chapter 8.

⁴³ Mother, focus group, Varzob.

⁴⁴ Father, case study, Dushanbe.

Such a traditional association of the girls with ‘temporary guests’ indicates the expectation that the girls must leave their home and become a member of another family. A girl should leave her parents’ home soon to become someone else’s daughter, hence to connect with another family and look after its members. Association of the girls as temporary guests in their families, makes the marriage an inevitable part of women’s lives. The role of a wife, mother and *kelin*, is not new for Tajik women but it has been emphasised and strengthened under the current context, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis. Thus while young men are expected to look after their parents, this role is mainly associated with the wives thus making *kelin* selection a family business⁴⁵. The association with ‘logs’ in the second quote above however demonstrates that neither should the girls be staying. If such a practical object as a log could be used for other purposes at any time, the girls’ ‘overstay’ in parental house after they reach certain age is not beneficial for both the family and the girls. As their brothers are also expected to get married at one point, the new *kelin* will take their place as a domestic worker and will eventually be a hostess in this household. Although brothers are protectors of their sisters throughout their lives (as I also describe in chapter eight), it is commonly expected that his wife might not be happy to live with her husband’s sisters and as a result could make their lives intolerable. It is thus in the interest of the girls as well to get married within the marriage window.

The marriage of the girls was a source of constant concern for most families. Nobody worried about a son not being married, but everybody seemed

⁴⁵ See chapter 7 for more analysis on the requirements used in bride selection.

to be anxious about the marriage potential of a young girl. During the field study, I met Zarnigor, a 79 years old woman who was married during the Soviet times and was a 'hero mother'⁴⁶ with 11 children. All Zarnigor's children were married and she had a vast number of grandchildren. Due to her age or the number of grandchildren, Zarnigor admitted she could not at times remember everyone's names. Interestingly though, although she could not tell the difference between who is who and which granddaughter is which child's daughter, she knew the exact number of her granddaughters that were still not married. She admitted that her greatest worry was finding husbands for all her granddaughters.

This section attempted to describe the inevitability of marriage for everyone in Tajikistan but particularly for the girls. According to the study respondents, marriage is unavoidable because the only role and expectation about the girls is to be wives and mothers. Such a cultural expectation is strengthened by the uncertain future for the girls as a result of limited socio-economic opportunities and has pushed the age of marriage down.

5.2 Marriage ideal

Now that I have clarified the importance of marriage for both men and women in Tajikistan, I would like to discuss the marriage that parents and their daughters usually expect or the marriage ideal.

⁴⁶ Women during the soviet times were encouraged to give birth to as many children as possible. Those with many children were granted with the title "hero mothers". Please refer to chapter 3 for more information on this and other history related facts.

A Tajik woman's main role, as demonstrated earlier, is to get married. While the age of marriage fluctuated at different historical periods in Tajikistan, the value of marriage itself remained the same throughout time and space. A young Tajik girl therefore has always been expected to be a good hostess, demonstrating extensive knowledge in cooking, having a perfectly tidy household and at the same time behaving appropriately and within moral guidelines (these will be discussed in depth in the following chapters). These qualities ensure that she is 'noticed' by a good family as a potential *kelin*.

After the marriage is arranged and the wedding takes place, the girl moves to her husband's house. Ideally, the newly formed family stays in their parent's house for only couple of months or years and moves to a separate house or flat provided by the men's family. However, if it is the youngest or the only son, who is responsible for taking care of his parents, then the newly married couple settles in this household. In present days, as I observed, brothers jointly build a bigger house that they share after the marriage. If it is not the case, then the husband's family, both direct and extended, are obliged to help financially to purchase a separate flat for the new family. This arrangement however, can sometimes take years.

In any case, a newly married woman moves to 'her new house' where she is expected to become hostess, able to make decisions and enjoy an authority after her husband. Even if she stays in her parents-in-law household, eventually, she becomes a second dominant individual in the family after the death of the parents. Women married to the youngest son are mostly viewed as more privileged, because not only they own the 'main' house, but also all its belongings, which sometimes includes a plot of land, a garden and a livestock.

While staying in parental household requires more responsibility for *kelin*, most of the girls in this study and their families hoped to find a man who is the youngest in the family. With the youngest son, at least a house is secured. For a woman to own a house and to move out from her parents' house is possible only through marriage. It is still very uncommon in Tajikistan for the women to live separately from their families without a husband. Living alone in fact raises questions about a woman's morality. Owning a house and becoming 'independent' from her parents is possible only through marriage.

A woman is trained all her life to take care of the new house, her husband, his parents and her children. She is not expected to be engaged in money earning outside of the household. Ideally, it is her husband's responsibility to work and provide for his family financially. Just as a woman is evaluated on the abundance of food in the house and the tidiness of the household, the man is evaluated by the wellbeing of his wife. Thus, I met women during the fieldwork who demonstratively wore their golden possessions, such as rings or earrings to boast their successful marriage. Consequently, a Tajik man has to be ready before the marriage as well. According to the respondents of this study, in the earlier years, young men would not get married until they were ready to financially support their wives and future children. Although the ideals remained the same, the reality is different for many, as I will demonstrate later. This ability of a man to provide material and financial support to his wife in recent years resulted in polygamous unions. While majority of the men in contemporary Tajikistan are not able to provide for their families, some men take two or more wives to demonstrate their power and wealth (SADC, 2002).

A successful marriage means a woman owns a household where she is or will be a full hostess. Having a decent husband also means, she is not only provided with the basics, such as food and clothes, but her material requirements are also met. Therefore, it is an attribute of any self-respected man to improve overall well-being of his wife. These are the ideals that drive families when arranging marriage for their daughters. The reality of course is different from the ideals, as I demonstrate later.

5.3 The ‘appropriate’ age for marriage

The age of first marriage for the girls as the focus of this thesis was the core of discussion during the fieldwork. The discussion was usually based around one question – the reason for the marriage age to get lower in the country or why families choose early marriage for their daughters. As mentioned earlier, in this study, the majority of the girls entered the marriage market at the age of 15 and were considered marriageable until the age of 19. Although legally the marriage age for both boys and girls is 18 years⁴⁷, as I observed during the fieldwork, most of the girls were either married by the age of 18 or they were very close to falling out of the marriage market.

According to most of the respondents, the girls enter the marriage market at the ‘right’ time. Although a 15 year old girl is considered a child according to International standards (as demonstrated in chapter 1), the families I met during the field work believed the Tajik girls are mature in every way by the time they

⁴⁷ See chapter 3 for more details on current state policies.

enter the marriage window. Moreover, the notion of ‘adolescence’, as Roche (2010) rightly noted does not exist in Tajikistan. As previously discussed in chapter 1, the biological determinants, such as menarche and breast development signal the girls maturity. Therefore ‘*dukhtarcha*’ [a little girl], turns into ‘*dukhtar*’, [a young female], based on the biological determinants, where ‘*dukhtar*’ is a transition period to becoming a “*zanak*”, [a mature woman], which one can achieve through marriage⁴⁸. Although ‘*dukhtar*’ is the age of youth, it is also a period of viewing a girl as a potential future *kelin*. Not only therefore is this period associated with more intense ‘*tarbiya*’ [moral upbringing] of the girl to undertake her future role, but it is also a period perceived as most vulnerable and dangerous. As a result, the girls are expected to behave in an appropriate manner at this particular time more than at any other times in their lives.

In Tajik families that live by the principle of honour and shame, the young girls’ purity and virginity is central⁴⁹. Although women are always under surveillance, teenagers, according to my respondents, are the most troubling, as they are unable to control their behaviour including sexuality. We will see how girls are under constant surveillance at this age in the next chapters, but their entrance to the marriage market at this age was considered timely, as their sexuality was expected to be trimmed by their husbands.

“Girls are like little goats... you look somewhere for a second and when you turn back they have caused you enormous troubles! The only difference is

⁴⁸ See chapter 1 for more details on these idioms.

⁴⁹ I talk about honour and shame briefly in chapter 2. For more details about honour and shame system in Tajikistan see Harris, 2004.

*– you can punish the goat and forget about it... but if the girl did something you can't fix it all by simply punishing her..."*⁵⁰

Most of the adults, particularly typical traditional families referred to the age group from 14 to 19, as having the potential for unfixable mistakes. Not only the girls but also boys were considered dangerous at this age. Although while the boys could do little harm to their families, the girls could ruin not only their own reputation but also destroy their family's respect in the community.

According to the families, bringing up a girl became particularly hard in recent years due to media exposure and availability of "inappropriate" information. The media thus taught the girls what the families find unnecessary and what morally good girls should avoid at all costs.

"...the girls today cannot be trusted! It is such a dangerous age and with all these crazy movies, they watch! You never know what to expect from them..."

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"When we were at the same age, I remember we were very shy to talk to our parents about certain things. Some topics were never discussed! You would learn about things when you got married. Today, the young people are very different. The other day I caught the girls looking at some book and laughing... As a teacher, I have to make sure pupils are at their best behaviour at school... so I instructed them to stop laughing and took away their book. How shocked I was later when I opened it! It was full of illustrations of different sexual positions!"

⁵⁰ Father, case study, Varzob.

⁵¹ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

*I immediately contacted their parents to punish the girls in the strictest possible manner!"*⁵²

Curiosity, although it might be natural, particularly for teenagers, was believed to influence the girls' morality in a negative way, according to the quotes above. The availability of certain literature or the straightforwardness of TV shows in recent years became an issue for adults in their attempt to bring up morally good children, unaware-of-taboo topics. Although an Internet connection is still unavailable in most parts of Tajikistan, finding information that interests young people did not seem to be a problem. Such issues became a reason for many girls to limit their communication with their friends when they reached the "*dangerous*" age, which I will return to in chapter seven.

While marriage has always been inevitable for individuals in a Tajik culture, the age of marriage has fluctuated from one time to another. The respondents of this study agreed that it has dropped in recent years and is different from what it used to be under the Soviet rule. The older women in this study recalled that at the age of 15 or 16 they were still at school during the years of the Soviet Union. The women admitted that they never thought about the age difference between marriage age back then and today before this study. The answers at this point were different depending on whom I asked. The professionals, particularly in the urban area and the women working at international organizations, believed it is due to changes in the mentality of Tajik families. They blamed the re-birth of religion in Tajikistan and the way it has been interpreted by Tajik families. According to this part of the respondents,

⁵² Teacher, Safedorak.

Tajik people due to limited knowledge about religion adopted only the 'worst practices'. Early age of marriage was therefore one of them.

Regular families, who were more likely to be born and wed during the Soviet period, responded differently depending on whether it was a man or a woman. According to the women interviewed in the family circle or during the focus groups, most of them got married after they finished secondary school and thus in their early 20s during the Soviet period. Therefore, they believed the drop in the age of marriage was a result of 'modernization'. The women blamed young girls for their drive to rush into marriage with a desire to increase their material possessions that the girls receive during the marriage transaction. The new generation of young girls were also blamed for their curiosity with regard to sexual life. At the same time, apart from what they called 'modernisation' almost all the women admitted they did not know what other options were available for the girls. The last statement was also supported by the men. The Tajik men, fathers and brothers, stated that the current marriage age is a result of difficult financial situations in the families. Most of the fathers acknowledged their anxiety about the future of their daughters and believed that through choosing an early marriage they made a fatherly contribution to the wellbeing of their daughters. At the same time, both men and women agreed they had to marry their daughters at an early age, because of the increased competition in the marriage market. They worried that if postponed, they would rob their girls of possibly the only chance for achieving happiness and security.

The marriage age therefore, lowered at the right time, according to my respondents. A 15 years old girl today, as people interviewed for this study believed, not only knew how to cook and behave morally but she had enough

knowledge about “*what to do with a husband at night*”⁵³. If not married within the marriage window, curiosity, bad media influence and availability of certain literature might do its trick – push a girl towards ruining her reputation and ending up unmarried. The age of marriage reduced, according to some respondents, due to religious beliefs. The families however admitted they had to accept a marriage proposal no matter how early due to the social and economic insecurity.

5.4 Marriage as socio-economic support

The reduction in the age of first marriage for the girls has not happened in a vacuum. While the majority of the respondents for this study believed the early age of marriage happened just in time for the generation whose perception of moral and cultural values has transformed in recent years, as discussed above, families agreed the shift in the marriage age happened as a result of the overall circumstances. I will bring certain examples throughout the empirical chapters to demonstrate the effect of socio-economic and political context on families’ decisions in regards to the age of marriage. I would however like to focus on the socio-economic part of it in more details in this section. This is mainly important, because I argue in this thesis that families choose early marriage for their daughters to ensure the latter’s future is socio-economically secured. This claim however, needs further clarification, which I am hoping to accomplish in this section.

⁵³ Mother, case study, Dushanbe.

The ideal type of marriage in Tajikistan, as described earlier, meant that (1) women now have a place they can call 'home' and (2) the women's well-being now is their husbands' responsibility. Although in reality, not many marriages ended up in such an ideal context, these were the main driving forces behind arranging the girls' marriage at an earlier age. Thus, these two principles apply no matter if a girl marries her cousin or a close relative or into a completely unknown family from another village. Families in this study based their decisions around these two expectations. It was particularly true for the families struggling financially.

The economic hardship or poverty was directly mentioned only by four families in this study, as linked with the reduction in the marriage age. Only these four families admitted they had to do it because they were struggling financially and had no other choice. Financial hardship was also mentioned during the four court hearings I attended as the main reason to gain permission for the girls to get married a year earlier than the legal age. The rest of the families and other people interviewed for this study, referred to other reasons, such as the traditional and cultural expectation mentioned earlier. At the same time however, poverty and financial hardship was of constant concern and in one way or another, it was usually linked with the marriage of the girls. Why it was not directly mentioned as a reason for the decline in the age of marriage was a puzzle for me at first. Later on when analysing the research findings, I concluded that, perhaps the families avoided admitting financial hardship for several reasons. First of all I believe, the poverty under which the families lived became so normal, they did not see the link between the financial struggle and the age of their daughters' marriage. The fact that most of them did not have

much to eat and could not afford some material “luxury” such as new clothes, was shared by almost every other family. Poverty therefore became a normal state of living. At the same time however, even if some were aware of the financial difficulty, perhaps they did not feel comfortable sharing their daily struggle with a stranger. Nevertheless, poverty was obvious in many families I visited and that had a certain influence on lowering of the marriage age for girls.

When I returned to the country for the fieldwork, I was struck by the reality of the everyday struggle that regular Tajik families had to live with. My research started in early spring when the weather in Tajikistan was getting hot and the electricity provision, which was limited for the winter season improved in many areas. The houses of the families I visited, nevertheless, were very cold. The houses or flats had concrete flooring, were very dark with little lighting, windows smashed and the glasses replaced by plastic bags. Children wore whatever was available, from oversized shoes to small size jumpers. The expression on people’s faces, which showed signs of exhaustion of a long and cold winter, was even more shocking than the reality they were surrounded by. Therefore although most of the families reported the tradition and the ‘dangerous age’ as discussed above, as the main reasons for the early marriage of the girls, it was clear during the conversation that marriage was also a way of improving their lives.

*“The family where my daughter is getting married has much better life than we do. They have their own business, his mother goes to Turkey to bring clothes and sell them...I have heard their house is very fancy...”*⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

*“...although the groom’s family is as poor as we are, they are still living a better life because they have men in the house who work... and I am just a helpless widow with 5 children. The boy is driving a mini bus so he is making some money at least...”*⁵⁵

*“This is one of the best families! Everybody knows and respects them! Of course, mostly this is because of their money, but who cares. My daughter will live there as a bird in a golden cage. She will not have to worry about anything at all!”*⁵⁶

The families saw the transition of their daughter to the new family as a beginning of an improved life. The parents in the quote above believed girls would be happier in their new family because of better living conditions. Even when the groom and his family are not as financially well off as the girls’ family, being married and thus having a male figure is to have security and protection, as the second quote indicates. Moreover, moving to any house but in this case a ‘fancy house’ where eventually a girl is expected to be a fully established hostess, is an important factor in marriage. Marriage to a family with the financially better situation is a successful arrangement as it also means the girl will be provided for financially, a responsibility that her future husband and his family are naturally expected to undertake.

To increase the girls’ chances of receiving any proposal but particularly from families with better financial situations, families worked very hard to turn their daughters into attractive brides in every possible way, as I will demonstrate

⁵⁵ Mother, case study, Dushanbe.

⁵⁶ Father, case study, Safedorak.

in the next chapters. As the brides' families had little power over choosing a family where their daughters would end up, because the marriage proposal came from the groom's family, they often were under the pressure of accepting any proposal that came first.

When my interest with this phenomenon had just started, I was judgemental towards the families. I could not understand how families decided upon arranging marriage for the girls when they are only teenagers. As I found out later, families and the girls simply did not see any other options for girls. Formal education although available has long lost its value. Both the girls, their families, as well as some professionals, such as teachers, believed it is best for the young girls to stay at home at the age when they enter the marriage market, rather than spending their time at schools that⁵⁷. The schools however were not only 'waste of time', but they also did not ensure a 'brighter future' for anyone in the country, according to many respondents. Although perhaps the situation was different during the Soviet Union time, when schools were compulsory and almost anyone was able to work afterwards⁵⁸, in contemporary Tajikistan life is not as easy. The families complained about lack of employment for their children, particularly sons, who had to migrate to other countries in the last years to earn money and support their families. For the girls therefore, marriage was the only option left in many cases.

*"...what are we to do with the girls tomorrow if they don't get married today?"*⁵⁹

⁵⁷ I bring field study examples in other chapters to demonstrate the general attitude towards school.

⁵⁸ See chapter three for more details on Soviet Union period and its influence on families' decisions.

⁵⁹ Mother, case study, Varzob.

*“The times when education could provide you with bread is long gone! Now we can only pray our daughters find a clever husband who knows how to make money ...”*⁶⁰

*“I am a man, I can carry heavy carts at the bazars to feed my family, but what can my sister do? Finding a job is very difficult today...although I am a lawyer by degree...”*⁶¹

In a country with an unemployment rate of over 40% (BTI, 2012), finding a paid job was difficult for both men and women. While men took other routes to feed their families, such as hard work in the country or migration to Russia, the only possible choice left for many girls was to get married. Although marriage has always been important for both men and women in Tajikistan, in recent years, the uncertainty of a future made early marriage an attractive alternative for the young girls and their families.

It would however be wrong to say all Tajik women were completely out of employment. A very small percentage of young ‘modernized’ girls became quite independent and ambitious through western education and employment at various organizations (several such cases will be described in chapter 8). A few others, more traditional girls I met in the city in particular, worked at beauty salons or small private places to sew traditional clothes or embroidery. Employment in fact, put these girls at risk of not receiving a marriage proposal at all, as few families wanted a *kelin* who spent most time outside rather than inside doing the domestic work. At the same time, the type of employment most

⁶⁰ Father, case study, Dushanbe.

⁶¹ Brother, case study, Varzob.

of the girls, particularly those in small business, were engaged at, did not make them economically sufficient. While the 'modernized' group postponed their marriage and missed the marriage window framework up to the point when they were labelled unmarriageable, the traditional girls had to quit their jobs at the first hint of the marriage proposal. I met one of such young women, Madina, at the local beauty salon. She quit her job to marry her cousin when she was 16.

*“Working here at the salon does not make me rich of course, but I always have some money in my pocket... when I got married however, my mother-in-law banned me from coming here...she said it is a shame for her and her son that I spent so much time who-knows-where every day. I am so happy the girls took me back after my divorce...but of course, I can't stay here forever, the money we make here is so little. Even though I hated being married, I am afraid I would get married again...I need a place of my own, I cannot stay at my parents' house forever...if I ever get another proposal of course...”*⁶²

The 'temporary' jobs, as the young women would refer to such an employment, even if they allowed the girls to earn some money and help support their families, did not guarantee financial wellbeing in future. Marriage from the other side, although unpleasant as in Madina's case, was still preferred as a better alternative.

In this section, I tried to demonstrate the socio-economic hardship that families live under which pressurizes them to accept a marriage proposal no

⁶² Daughter, case study, Varzob.

matter how early it might come. The socio-economic opportunities, such as education and employment became scarce in the country for both men and women, but the lack of such opportunities affected women more. Apart from the rather small number of women who were believed to be economically independent, many girls were not able to support themselves economically through the few available jobs. Families that struggled to make ends meet hoped to improve their daughters' lives with the 'ideal marriage'.

5.5 The danger of not being married within the window

Families and the girls in this study expected a marriage proposal after the girls reached the age of 15. For the reasons stated earlier, when marriage is inevitable and it is expected to improve the life of women, waiting for a marriage proposal is a stressful time, according to the study's respondents. Although families put a lot of effort to increase their daughters' marriage opportunity the proposal itself came from the groom's side (I will return to both questions in the later chapters). The age of marriage consequently was believed to be lowered by the grooms' families, as they gave preference for girls of younger age in contemporary Tajikistan. Not receiving a marriage proposal, nevertheless, had its consequences.

At the point when the girls and their families waited for the marriage proposal, the decision to decline a proposal was very risky as it was impossible to tell whether there will be other suitors. Although preference was given to families with better social and economic conditions, the anxiety associated with

expecting a marriage proposal and the prospect of not having any suitors at all resulted in accepting the first proposal in the majority of the cases. Declining a proposal, almost never happened, according to respondents of this study.

*“... we had to agree to this proposal because who knows when the next one will be or whether there will be any others. There are so many good girls around waiting for the marriage... and Rukhshona is turning 18 this year... this proposal I have to say came just in time.”*⁶³

*“...today when there are more girls than boys, finding a good husband, any husband in fact, is not easy! We cannot afford to choose...”*⁶⁴

Families considered themselves lucky to have any proposals, particularly with the marriage market becoming more competitive each year as a new generation of girls entered the market while the number of nubile men was limited in the country, due to high migration level. If the first proposal was not accepted, it put a girl at risk of falling out of the narrow marriage window. After passing the age of the marriage window, finding a marriage partner became more difficult.

In a few cases, I met families with several marriage proposals. These were usually the families' with a good status and connections or strong family roots associated with good reputation. Such families although they were in a better position and had the luxury of choice, also faced a dilemma. As most of the proposals were from close relatives and relationships were crucial for social

⁶³ Mother, case study, Dushanbe.

⁶⁴ Mother, case study, Varzob.

co-existence, rejecting a proposal and thus displeasing any family but especially a related family was highly undesirable. One of such families I observed, as a result of getting several proposals from close relatives, found a solution by arranging marriage for two daughters at the same time; both the one who received the marriage proposals and the younger daughter who was not planned to be married yet. Such a marriage solution kept everybody happy; the proposing families got a *kelin* from a desired family, and the brides' family freed themselves from anxiety over the unmarried younger daughter. This type of families however were not so common in comparison to the families that had to wait and therefore accept any proposal.

Not being married within the marriage window often resulted in stigmatizing the girl. Families but also the girls ensured they attracted other families and became a 'desirable' *kelin*. Not being desired, as a result, labelled a girl as 'wrong', as it was assumed that if the family did not receive any proposals, the girl did not 'meet the requirements'⁶⁵. This in turn effected the girls' reputation even further and decreased her chances of marriage to a minimum. At the same time, as marriage was in many cases, the only way for future security, finding a marriage partner was crucial. Girls, who fell out of the marriage window and were still single, ended up in unions with a widower or as second wives.

As I was looking into the early marriage, I did not personally interview a woman, who either was planning to become a second wife or already was in polygamous marriage. Such marriages, although illegal, however, are reported

⁶⁵ I talk more about grooms' families' expectation in chapter 7.

to increase in the country⁶⁶. Polygamous unions, however, put the women in a more disadvantaged position. As a second wife the marriage was not registered (although in most cases even the first marriages were not registered either) and the children were, as a result, not considered lawful (SADC, 2002). Thus, in cases of family breakdown, the second wives and their children were thrown out of their husband's houses with nothing. Moreover now having several children, the women found themselves in a more economically disadvantaged position (SADC, 2002).

The rest of the girls not married within the marriage market ended up marrying widowers with children to avoid the stigma. Marrying a widower was considered the last and extreme option. It was believed that the men, who could afford second wives, were financially able to take care of two women, while a widower might not only be unable to take care of a wife but also had other financial responsibilities, such as children from the previous marriage. Marrying a widower, according to my respondents was therefore a failure. It was nevertheless considered as a better option rather than not being married at all, because according to a respondent, Jamila, a 76 years old woman, "*a married frog has a status*"⁶⁷. Having any husband was therefore better than not having one at all.

The polygamous unions or marrying a widower did not affect the respondents of this study directly. Most of the girls I interviewed already

⁶⁶ More information on polygamy can be found in SADC, 2002.

⁶⁷ Grandmother, case study, Safedorak.

received a marriage proposal and were getting married. Nevertheless, families constantly talked about such cases and feared similar cases.

*“Apai Salima has a very good daughter. She said several families asked about her and expressed an interest... but nobody came to propose. What can they do? It is different with sons... Apai Salima says, her sister knows a widower with four children in her village... She says he is a nice man although much older of course and with four children! That poor girl...”*⁶⁸

The tragedy of the girl not being married and the anxiety of her family is obvious from the quote above. As the proposal did not come in time and the girl was getting older, the family took extreme measures. The girls' families usually wait for the proposal rather than arrange one themselves. In such cases, as above, even though the girl was only 20 years old, the family arranged the marriage with the most unwanted groom, a widower.

For the girls with all the conversations about the marriage importance and with the competition among their friends over who got the first proposal, such a transition was associated with improved status. The girls in this study believed that with marriage they would gain more respect among their friends and the wider community. The attitude towards them in general was expected to change for the best. For this reason, marriage, no matter how early, was highly preferred and anxiously expected by most of the young girls met during the fieldwork. Although disputes could occur over the groom selection, marriage itself was almost never rejected⁶⁹. In a society where the women's only role was

⁶⁸ Mother, focus group, Varzob.

⁶⁹ I talk about the girls' ability to make certain choices in chapter 8.

strengthened⁷⁰ and shaped by the lack of other opportunities to being a wife, as I argue throughout this thesis, the girls who fail to get married were mistreated and judged. The social pressure was visible to Zamira from the quote below. Not being married when you should be was associated with offensive looks and comments from people, particularly men.

“Growing older and not being married is uncomfortable... you think that when people look at you that is all they see, that you are still not married. Also the men start behaving differently – it is like you lose everyone’s respect. People think something must be wrong with you... For those who are married it is different... they are somebody’s wives and deserve a respect. The men change their attitude towards them and do not dare to look or say something offensive.”

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Marriage was a way of avoiding bad looks and gaining respect and therefore of a special importance to all the girls I met, irrespective of educational or social background. This indication of the internalized social values and gendered expectations shaped the decisions made by the girls in favour of marriage, as I will describe in chapter eight. As a true Tajik woman is the one with excellent domestic hostess who is married, all of the girls met in this study saw marriage as a significant and in most of the cases even the only part of their future.

⁷⁰ See chapter 3 for more information on the state strengthening the traditional role of women in the recent years.

⁷¹ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

At the same time, the prospect of a girl not getting married complicated her life even more as she stayed in her parents' house. As parents get older and die, the responsibility of taking care of the women is passed to brothers. Although brothers as males are responsible for protecting and looking after their sisters, the relationship takes an economic turn along with the social in cases when the girls fail to get married. Hence, the brother sister relationship was anticipated to change if the girl fell out of the marriage market. The unmarried girl becomes financially dependent on her brother. As a result, in cases, reported in this study, when the brother was married and his wife took her mother-in-law role after the death of the latter as the dominant female, the unmarried sister was not welcomed in her house any more. She was described as alien to the family, bullied and slandered by her *kelin*. To avoid such harm to the girl and free her from possible dependency on her *kelin*, marriage was once again the only escape. The interdependency and mutual responsibility for each other, as part of the connectivity theory, once again made the marriage of the girls important for the whole family.

*“... now I don't have to worry about my daughter if something happens with me... she is married now, so she is safe...”*⁷²

“...her husband and her mother-in-law might beat her, call her names or starve her, but at least she will not depend on her brother and his wife when I die. I tell my daughter every day, you have to be patient and accept every

⁷² Father, case study, Dushanbe.

treatment you get in your new home, this is your family now and you cannot come back..."⁷³

Interestingly it was normal for the women to depend on someone rather than being completely independent. With their future primary roles as mothers and wives, depending on a husband and his family was more desirable than depending on somebody else, even if it was a brother. It should be mentioned though, such expectations from the marriage were unfortunately not always successful.

This section demonstrated the tension of the girls and their families over finding a decent husband within the narrow and early marriage window. If the girl outgrew the marriage window, she could still find a husband, which was most likely to be either a man with one wife already or a widower. I therefore do not intend to argue that all the women in the country follow the same destiny. The majority of the families in this study, however, were concerned about the prospect of having unmarried daughters. As marriage was to improve the social but also the economic situation of the girls, not being married resulted in negative consequences, such as not having one's own place of living and depending on their brothers and his family. Those past the narrow marriage window looked for other alternatives, less desirable, such as becoming a second wife or marrying a widower with children.

⁷³ Mother, case study, Varzob.

5.6 Love, affection and the role of 'destiny'

In this section, I would like to explore the related concepts of love, affection and 'destiny'. Although the goal of the thesis is to explore the causes of early marriage, one also has to recognize the potentially negative consequences of such marriages⁷⁴. While the consequences may result in social, health and economic difficulties, the intention to have the girls married at an early age is not intended to cause harm. I thus argue in this study that even though Tajik families might be aware of the negative consequences, they do not arrange their daughters' marriage in order to oppress and to worsen their lives. Rather, marriage in this study is a demonstration of love and affection towards the girls, as families try to secure their future. Unfortunately, however, the result of the arrangement is out of the parents' control. Parents therefore rely on destiny, the second notion I clarify in this section. Destiny in fact serves as an explanation to many other events that go wrong and signifies 'God's will' at times when humans have little power to change the life course.

Marriage, in ideal cases provides Tajik women with social and financial security. Tajik families today arrange the marriage of their daughters at an early age because they do not want the girls to miss their sometimes only option for such security. For families therefore, arranging their daughters' marriage was a demonstration of love, a notion that is often described as lacking in dominant families. In Tajik families that function through age and gender dominance and where decisions are made collectively in favour of the youth love is difficult to imagine. This is particularly true towards women. It is difficult at times to picture

⁷⁴ See chapter 1 for research on the negative impacts of early/child marriage in other developing countries.

feelings such as affection when girls are engaged in domestic work from early childhood, their actions are supervised and policed at all times, when preference is given to boys when deciding on official education and where families arrange the marriage of girls at very young age. Nevertheless, all the actions are directed by warm and affectionate feelings.

Demonstrating love and affection openly however is not considered appropriate in a Tajik society. I will demonstrate this relationship in examples throughout the next chapters, but particularly in chapter six. Rarely do family members express love physically or verbally. Parents would hug and kiss their children until the teenage years. Once the child reaches a certain age however, *tarbiya* [moral upbringing] becomes an important part of parent child relationship. From this point on therefore, love and affection are demonstrated through every day actions, through participating in each other's lives, providing guidance, observing behaviour, making decisions for each other and sometimes even punishing those who fail. The younger generation at the same time display respect towards the older family members as a sign of love. This interrelationship therefore although directed by love and care is displayed through other important, at this stage, ways. Consequently, it is not unusual to see separate individuals putting the interest of other family members before their own. For example, during the fieldwork, I met a young woman whose marriage had been arranged by her family recently. The young woman, however, was not happy in this arrangement, as she suffered from her new husband's physical abuse and her mother-in-law's verbal abuse. Nevertheless, each time her parents called or visited, she demonstratively played a happy

person assuring her parents that her marriage is successful. According to her, she pretended to keep her parents happy.

Similarly, parents arranged their daughters' marriage in a hope that the girls' new family will take care of them. This is the reason associated by many with the cousin marriages, as I will show later. With every new marriage, parents imagine their girls entering a happy stage of their lives, where they are appreciated and are provided with a decent living arrangement. Unfortunately, however, not many marriages result in such ideal ways. Often the girls find themselves in families that abuse them physically, economically and verbally. In such cases, the girls' families only can feel sorry for their daughters and blame their 'luck'.

The intention of the families to arrange their daughters' marriage is thus directed by love towards the girls. How the marriage turns out, however, is difficult to tell and is thus out of families' control. In arranging the girls' marriages therefore, families rely on luck and associate it with the girls 'destiny'. 'Destiny' is explained as 'god's will' or 'fate prescribed by god before a person is born'. According to 'destiny', therefore, each person is born with his own fate and humans can do nothing to change that fate. Such a religious belief is often relied on in situations when people are powerless in the face of the facts. The dependency on destiny could probably explain the number of unsuccessful marriages in the country. Nevertheless, parents hoped the fate of their daughter would be different from the previous one every time they arrange a new marriage. Thus, in a country that failed to provide its people with security, families are left to rely on their own efforts and beliefs, such as destiny.

5.7 Types of marriages

After discussing the age of marriage and the main reasons for its lowering in the previous sections, I would now like to describe the marriage practices in Tajikistan, observed during the fieldwork. While this section covers different types of marriages, almost all of them fall under arranged marriage, apart from 'love' marriage. Arranged marriage have been previously described as a way of demonstrating parental authority (Harris, 2004). I however hold a different opinion here. I believe arranging marriage is better explained under connectivity theory (Joseph, 1999)⁷⁵, where families function in a way that accommodates the interest of the whole family, not just two separate individuals. Marriage in Tajikistan is almost never about the two individuals but rather involve two families with all their relationships and values. So choosing a marriage partner is not a simple demonstration of power as it has several goals: (a) to ensure security for the women as part of the parental responsibility; (b) to establish connection with another family; (c) in case of the marriage arrangement for boys, provide the household, usually mother-in-law with a domestic "assistant". I will try to demonstrate the above in this section.

Arranged marriages

97% of the marriages were arranged for the girls in this study. However, the majority of the women interviewed in this study confirmed they arranged not

⁷⁵ See chapter 2 for theories used in this thesis.

only their daughters but also their sons' marriage⁷⁶. The men could openly discuss their preferences in many cases though, while the conformity to parental wish was part of the girls' moral upbringing and thus highly expected. The decision over whom the girl should marry usually was with the family and the bride was not expected to express her wish when it came to the marriage. Such conformity was negotiable, however, in most of the cases, as I will describe the self-interested decisions of the girls in chapter eight.

Arranging the girls' marriage was an almost impossible task. As discussed earlier, the bride's families were not in a position to negotiate their daughters' marriages and could only wait for a marriage proposal. Nevertheless, when the proposal would come, it would be negotiated between the adults of the family without involving the girl herself. The girls' families although open to any proposal, as demonstrated earlier, cherished those that could end up in relating with a family of good status and connections.

"... I am not just marrying off my daughter today... I am increasing my family size, because tomorrow if I see her parents-in-law somewhere I will be proud to say that I am related to them now..."⁷⁷

"...I hope the marriage will turn out to be good not only for my daughter but for all of us. I will try and help them where I can and in return I hope the groom's family could connect me with someone at the Hukumat... I have been

⁷⁶ This is different from what Roche, 2010 indicates in her study.

⁷⁷ Father, case study, Safedorak.

trying to buy a land for building a new house for years now! You know what it is like, you don't know anyone, you don't get anything... ”⁷⁸

The two newly united families assisted each other economically or socially and they were involved in the celebrations and funerals as any other family member. Both families quoted above arranged their daughters' marriage to a non-relative, but a family with a better financial and social status. Through such an arrangement, the families not only secured their daughter's future but also hoped the newly related family would assist with any issues they might have. It was thus normal for the families to have such expectations from each other after becoming closer through marriage of their children.

Marriages were mostly arranged among the families of the same community, village or region and very rarely with families from the outside. Unlike Roche (2010) who found interracial marriages to be common in the part of Tajikistan she conducted her research, meeting families that had arranged marriages to a person from a different region, not to even mention a different nation was very uncommon. International marriages can only be observed in rare cases among the girls from the urban area who are considered 'modernized' and almost never among the traditional families that were the focus of this study. Preference for brides from the same region was also linked with the strong sense of regionalism that exists in Tajikistan⁷⁹. While everybody is Tajik, the practices of one region were believed to be different from another

⁷⁸ Father, case study, Varzob.

⁷⁹ The preference for marriage partners from the same village and region was also noted by Tett, 1996

and therefore it was undesirable to make a union with families from other regions.

Surprisingly though, when arranging the marriage for the girls, whether to a stranger or a relative, families in my case studies, although hoped for ideal type of families (those described earlier), did not have specific expectations regarding the grooms. In comparison to the girls and a clear requirement in regards to the qualities and skills that each marriageable girl must possess (as I discuss in chapter 7), little was expected from the grooms. Families especially but the girls also relied on luck and associated the success of the marriage and selection of the right groom with destiny, as mentioned in the earlier section. The girls at least had some physical expectations from their husband to want him to be taller, or dark haired and white skin and so on. One quality that mattered, however, was to ensure the groom did not have any drug addictions or illness. This however could not be a barrier if the girl had not received other proposals. With the restricted opportunities available for the girls to arrange their future, each marriage chance was accepted, as I indicated earlier. In their effort to protect their daughters through marriage, families that were unable to influence the proposal were consequently forced to rely on destiny, claiming it to be uncontrollable.

Marriages were thus arranged for the girls in this study. Although I came across cases where marriage was enforced, most of the girls observed during the case studies were able to negotiate their interest, as I will demonstrate in chapter eight.

Cousin marriages

Most of the marriages in the observed case studies were arranged among relatives, usually cousins from the father's side. Months after I finished my field research, a proposal to ban cousin marriages in Tajikistan was reported due to high risk of genetic disorders in children from such unions (Qosimzoda, 2013). Whether this proposal will be accepted and the legislation will stop such marriages or it will remain on paper similar to marriage age legislation (as I demonstrate in chapter 9) is not clear yet. Nevertheless, at the time I conducted my research such marriages were common.

Most of the families I met supported cousin marriages considering it a better option as they had some control over such an arrangement. Families, directed by close connections and valuing families more than individuals chose cousin marriages as an indication of respect towards each other showing the preference for related girls. The grooms' families believed a related *kelin* would treat the in-laws as her own parents and thus will take a better care of them. The brides' families, on the other hand, hoped through relative marriages they are protecting their daughters, as a related family would not abuse a person from the same blood in any way⁸⁰.

However, no matter how the families hoped and used cousin marriages as one of the strategies to protect their children, such marriages did not always work. While the majority of the families in the process of arranging marriages with relatives approved cousin marriages, a few families that already had their daughters married to relatives were disappointed. I came across two related

⁸⁰ Preference for cousin marriages are also noted by Roche, 2010.

families that did not talk to each other as a result of the girls' mistreatment and a broken marriage of their children. Nevertheless, some of the girls were betrothed or promised to be married with their cousins sometimes early in childhood. Such arrangement was reported to usually occur among fathers who agreed to marry their children once they are older, however several times other males were also involved, such as grandfathers or uncles. For example, Safina, 16 years old was getting married to a distant relative from another village, because her uncle, promised her to this family when she was only 9 years old. Safina's family welcomed such an arrangement. It gave the family the sense of security knowing that their daughter is promised and therefore relatives will sooner or later come to ask for the girl's hand. Sometimes expecting the proposal from the betrothed family took longer than expected and I thus met a family whose daughter was getting married at the very "late" age of 22 as they waited for their relatives to arrange the marriage.

Cousin or relative marriages were viewed as a better alternative not only for the families but also the girls. Marrying a cousin was safer because it was someone they knew and had seen before. Besides, knowing some of the groom's characteristics was believed to make the adjustment to a new life easier.

"Marrying my cousin! I used to play with him when we were children and now we are going to have children together... my parents always talked about it even when we were children, but I never took it seriously...it is easier I

suppose, as we both know each other very well...and his mother is like a mother to me already..."⁸¹

Although some of the girls from the case studies opposed marrying their cousin and talked their way out of such marriages⁸², the majority of the young girls approved these arrangements. Similar to Muhayo, quoted above, young girls, who were expected to live with the groom and his family upon marriage, believed it was an easier transition from one family to another.

Marriage and love

It was anticipated that the women would accept their parents' decisions on many issues, particularly those related to marriage, as mentioned above, or negotiate their interest, as I will demonstrate later. At the same time however, denying that feelings, such as love and passion towards the opposite gender, cannot emerge would not be completely true. Unfortunately, as I showed in chapter 4, I had limited opportunity to speak to the girls alone without their parents or other adults. Talking openly about the feelings the young girls felt towards the man they were going to marry or discussing the notion of love and passion in general was out of the scope of this study. Naturally, though, I assume, as these girls were teenagers, the relationship towards the opposite gender could have been based around curiosity, sympathy or passion.

⁸¹ Daughter, case study, Varzob.

⁸² I will demonstrate several cases in chapter 8.

Therefore although never openly discussed, I observed girls who were excited about the marriage and girls who were not so happy. With the first ones, it was easy to assume that the girls approved of their grooms either because they knew them from childhood, in cases of cousin marriages or because they had seen their photos (as in the case with Mavzuna). I also observed the young girls shared secret looks with some of the boys and giggles among the girlfriends as they entrusted their dearest secrets. Interestingly though, the word love was avoided as much as possible. Love or any other kind of affectionate feelings are generally considered inappropriate in a Tajik context not only among unmarried people, but also even among married couples. On more than one occasion, I have heard the older women condemn the newly married couples as they demonstrated affection towards each other. Although such actions were quite simple, for example joking with each other or a young man helping his wife carry a heavy load, other family members found it inappropriate and shameful. Holding each other's hands or other physical demonstration were completely out of question. For an unmarried woman therefore, mentioning the word *ishq* [love] was similar to cursing. When love was obvious however, families tried to cover or present it as something else. The following case is an excellent example.

Fieldwork observation:

Malik, a 24 year old male was back from Russia where he spent 4 years. One day he met his cousin Parvina, who was now 14 years old. After seeing her, Malik requested his mother to speak to her sister and arrange the marriage with Parvina. However, Parvina's family thought she was too young and politely declined the marriage. Whether Parvina's age was the real reason behind the decline is not clear, but

Malik was certainly not happy with the decision and decided to take extreme measures. In Tajikistan it is normal to live with the relatives, especially when people travel to other regions, they stay with their relatives. Malik came to Dushanbe, where Parvina lived, to stay at Parvina and her family's house. By such an action, Malik pressured Parvina's family and especially her father. First of all, the family feared the rumours among the neighbours who knew about Malik's proposal and as a potential groom it was not appropriate for two young people to live under one roof before they are married. And second, now that Malik lived with the family, it was dangerous leaving these two young people alone because "god knows what could happen" according to the mother. As a result Parvina was rushed into the marriage with Malik as soon as she turned 15. At the time I met the family, the marriage was planned to take place in few months. When Parvina's mother told me the story, she presented it as pressure from Malik. Parvina however seemed thrilled by such an arrangement. She was constantly winking at me throughout the story until her mother put a stop to it.

Throughout this case, love was not mentioned even once. Parvina's family explained Malik's action as a behaviour of a spoiled child by his mother's affection. Parvina's feelings were not mentioned at all, as the family representing the marriage only as pressured by the "young silly man" where Parvina took very little action if any at all.

The whole word of love as it is, in fact was mentioned only once during the study.

Fieldwork observation:

17-year-old Bunavsha 'met' Parviz online through a social network 'Odnaklassniki'. Parviz worked in Russia and was looking for a Tajik wife. After communicating with each other for 3 months, the girl told him that her father was talking about arranging her marriage with a co-worker's

son. Parviz immediately requested his family to go and ask Bunavsha's hand from her father. When I asked Bunavsha why she wanted to get married to Parviz and not the other man, she said they were "in love". Bunavsha told her mother about it, who feared the consequences of people finding out about her daughter's communication with a man. Such a rumour might result in destroying Bunavsha's reputation and with it other marriage possibilities. Bunavsha's mother therefore persuaded her husband to accept this marriage proposal.

This last case might not be the only one existing, particularly knowing the exposure of young people to different means of socializing in this era of technology. Such means however were still relatively limited in Tajikistan and were only available to those more or less urbanized. Therefore, girls like Bunavsha who were torn between the traditional expectations of keeping her reputation pure and yet being able to arrange her own marriage were rather rare.

Feelings are thus a normal occurrence for Tajik girls, even though considered inappropriate. I would have possibly got deeper insight into the question of love and affection if I had spoken to the girls privately. Above are the few observations I made during the fieldwork which demonstrate yet another type of marriage that, although rare is still possible in a Tajik society.

This section described various types of marriages practiced in Tajikistan observed during the fieldwork. The majority of the marriages I came across in this study were arranged between the families for either protection reasons, as with the cousin marriages, or to get closer connection with the other family and thus increase the social and financial network. Love marriages however also

existed. These types of marriages in the two cases described earlier, were presented as arranged, where the word love was avoided as much as possible. Thus although the marriage preferences vary from one case to another, most of the families preferred arranged marriages for the girls in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter is a lead in chapter that explained some of the terms and notions used in this study, as well as introduced the reader to the current marriage patterns in Tajikistan. It discussed clarified how decisions are made in Tajik families, how love and affection are demonstrated through an arranged marriage and how families rely on 'destiny' in cases when the situation is out of their control. The chapter also demonstrated the 'ideal type' of marriage that drives the families when they arrange the girls' marriage. According to this ideal thus, a marriage is a way to provide a girl with a place to live and a person to provide financial support. However, I also demonstrated several cases when the 'ideal type' did not occur.

Apart from these notions, I discussed the current age of marriage for the girls from the respondents' perspective and briefly discussed the causes for its lowering. As we have seen from several sections, marriage is socially valued and therefore inevitable for anyone but particularly women. Families accepted any first proposal, hoping to improve their daughters' life through marrying them off to a financially better off family. Getting a proposal from a family with a financially but also a socially better life secures the girls future. However, as marriages in Tajikistan are almost never about the two individuals only,

arranged marriages were also to get a closer connection and an increased social network.

In a country where the formal education has lost its value and unemployment rates are high for anyone, but particularly women, the institution of marriage was often seen as the last option. The marriage market therefore started at an early age of 15 for the girls and put the families of the girls under enormous stress. Waiting for the marriage proposal was an anxious period because falling out of the marriage window has negative consequences, such as becoming a second wife, marrying a widower, and in worst cases not getting married at all and becoming financially dependent on other family members.

Analysing the overall marriage patterns and the reason behind decreasing the marriage age in this chapter, I would like to now move to discussing the families' strategies to increasing the girls' marriage chances. When families are under pressure to receive a marriage proposal, the strategies that although seem to be interwoven into the culture and thus perhaps always existed, start at an earlier age for the girls today. The next two chapters will address the families' strategies.

Chapter 6

***Tarbiya* of a girl-child: learning age and gender appropriate behaviour.**

This chapter will focus on girls regarded as children in Tajik community, those before the age of 12. Discussing this age range is important for two main reasons. It demonstrates that although the girls' upbringing has always been important, acquisition of such significant knowledge as age and gender appropriate behaviour starts earlier for the girls due to the current marriage age. The chapter also analyses the families' strategy in details, focusing on how the girls start learning the appropriate behaviour as early as 10 years of age.

As this chapter will demonstrate, girls below this age are engaged in the process of '*tarbiya*' [moral upbringing] through every day activities. *Tarbiya* at this point is complex but complementary; considered as children and yet being engaged in the adults' world, it is at this age that girls first learn the gender and age appropriate behaviour. This chapter therefore indicates the significance of this age range and argues that the fundamental knowledge about moral behaviour and domestic responsibility that are acquired at this stage have significant contribution to the overall knowledge necessary for the women in their final goal, the marriage. Through demonstrating the process of *tarbiya* at this age, the current chapter contributes to the overall argument of the thesis that Tajik families strategize their approach to increasing the marriage chances of their daughters. The families' strategy to arrange the marriage of their daughters at the younger age, although it might be a new phenomenon, however, seems to be interwoven into the overall importance of marriage for

Tajiks. Thus although the strategies seem to have always existed, the process of crafting the girls to become perfect *kelins* starts earlier than before.

'*Tarbiya*' as a significant part of Tajik children's moral upbringing has been noted previously by Roche (2010) and Stephan (2009). The term "*tarbiya*" is translated as 'upbringing' into English, but it has a significant meaning attached to it in a Tajik language. Through "*tarbiya*", the role of any adult person in a Tajik community, irrespective of whether related or not, is to socialize the youth and to teach them morality. Moral behaviour, as also noted by Stephan (2009) is to guide the youth and to show them the 'right path' (p.470). Although Stephan focuses on adolescents and argues that *tarbiya* is of more significance at this life stage, I believe it starts earlier, as I demonstrate in this chapter. Stephan also notes the role of *tarbiya* in the web of relations that are based on the authority of grownups over the younger generation that give 'point and direction to life' (p. 470). I similarly demonstrate how *tarbiya* is a form of engaging in each other's lives through the intimate relationships and gender and age dominance. According to Stephan (2009), religion plays a significant role in *tarbiya* providing moral guidance. While I agree with Stephan, in this thesis I focus on the role of *tarbiya* in shaping individual selves within Tajik families. *Tarbiya* in this chapter also demonstrates the sense of responsibility towards each other and therefore love and affection. This moral upbringing allows individuals demonstrate such feelings without words and physical contact, which in Tajik communities play a less significant role. Female morality therefore, should be learned from an early childhood and it is associated with the shame. Girls need to possess and display such attributes of shame as modesty, shyness and virtue (Stephan, 2009).

Focusing on childhood was not part of the initial research plan. I came to the village with the goal of interviewing the older girls who were getting married along with their parents or other family members. However, later when analysing the data, describing this age span appeared to be highly significant in understanding early marriage of girls in the country. Luckily, I had plenty of notes on the main character of this chapter, little Nodira who I found astonishing in her interaction with her siblings and her ability to negotiate, prioritize and make purposeful decisions. In addition, along with other interview notes I found relevant pieces of information provided by the family members that concerned Nodira. By putting the information together, I was able to reconstruct the characteristics of this little 10 years old girl.

The focus of this chapter is therefore on Nodira, a 10 years old typical Tajik girl. Nodira was not different from other Tajik girls of her age. She wore the same clothes, shared the same values and went through appropriate to her age *tarbiya* similar to other little girls. Just as many other of her friends, Nodira had specific chores at home she had to perform, certain rules she had to remember, but she also could still attend school and interact with her friends. Although Nodira's relationship with her siblings seems to be very complicated, I would assume to have similar findings if I have chosen a different 10 years old girl. Perhaps the findings would be different depending on the number of siblings the other girl would have, but the involvement of siblings in the process of *tarbiya* and their usage of techniques I expect would be the same.

I draw upon Suad Joseph's patriarchal connectivity (1999) throughout the empirical chapters. In this chapter I also draw on her work on brother/sister relationship (1994) to demonstrate how by interacting with significant others on

a daily basis and displaying power, authority and obedience or agency, the siblings learn how to grow into the expected man patriarch or subordinate woman and thus turn into Tajik individuals. This complex relationship keeps the system of dominant and subordinate in a way that it accommodates everyone. Joseph's work on the brother/sister relationship however, described the complexity of relationship among brothers and sisters only. Here I am able to discuss the significance of Nodira's interaction with both brothers and sisters separately.

The relationship among siblings in a Tajik context has been discussed by Roche (2010). Although mostly based on the brothers' relationship, Roche demonstrates the 'societal organization' and its influence on the 'seniority position that continues with siblings relations' (p. 228). For Roche the relationship is mostly between the dominant, oldest brother and subordinate, youngest brother. In contrary to Roche, I view the relationship among siblings, brothers and sisters in this thesis, as based on mutual responsibilities and the importance of participating in each other's lives through '*tarbiya*'.

I met Nodira in one of the families where I lived for almost two months during my field research in the village. She is the youngest daughter of my hostess Nazokat and has two older sisters and two older brothers. The younger of the brothers was not living at home at the time of my research as he migrated to Russia for work. Their oldest brother Nasim is 23; he is married and lives in the same household with his wife and two children. Even though it is culturally expected for a son to live with his parents upon marriage and take care of

them⁸³, in this family he is also the only male (as their father passed away years ago) and therefore is responsible for all the females. The age difference among the sisters is only 3 to 4 years, Nodira is 10, her older sister Sarvinoz is 13 and the oldest Manija is 17 years old.

6.1 Sisters: chores and age hierarchy

Mornings start very early in a Tajik household. Everyone wakes up to the morning chores around the house which every member of the family is expected to undertake. The chores are distributed among men and women evenly, but the women have the bigger share, as they are associated with the domestic chores. Nodira, as the youngest child in the family, had her own contribution to the household work. Although her share was not as big as her sisters, it was still considered important as it taught her the main steps to domestic work that would get more complicated as Nodira grows up. While Nodira had fixed duties she was responsible for every day, her work was not limited to only these, because as the youngest in the family she had to implement instructions from older family members. As mentioned earlier, according to the age hierarchy that exists not only in Tajik families but in the whole Tajik society, the younger people are socialized to show respect towards those older in age and to listen to their moral and behavioural guidance as well as follow their orders, no matter if it is a family member or not. Such a hierarchy is not limited to the girls only and also involves men of any age.

⁸³ Also noted by other researches, such as Harris, 2004, Roche, 2010, Tett, 1996.

Nodira complied with the orders of the adults in the family but was closely monitored in doing so by her older sister Sarvinoz. Sarvinoz, being 13 years of age, also in turn implemented the instructions from other women in the family as she did her share of the household chores. She, however, used her age as an advantage and made Nodira undertake half of her tasks and even more. Thus, if Nodira finished or was still performing her own work, she got constant orders from Sarvinoz to do other work not related to Nodira's duties. The other women and especially their mother did not rush to help Nodira in such cases as they believed that Sarvinoz as the older sister had the right to *tarbiya* Nodira as much as she liked. The age hierarchy was hence one of the tools provided through patriarchal connectivity and thus intimate relationship to give women power over those who were younger. The importance of respecting an older age, even if it was only by 3 years, as in the case of Nodira and Sarvinoz, was part of the '*tarbiya*' for Nodira. As the youngest one, Nodira expected to practice her authority once her brother's children grew up to listen to her orders and to learn the importance of obeying her.

Nodira however found Sarvinoz powerful not only in relation to her but in general in the family, because she was their brother Nasim's favourite sister, or so everyone believed. Indeed, Sarvinoz was the only female Nasim communicated with when he was back home. Her mother believed this was because Sarvinoz looked like a boy herself, as she did not care much about her appearance unlike her older sister Manija. I will return to Nasim's perception of Sarvinoz later in this chapter. Nodira admired Sarvinoz's ability of behaving differently and with little restraint when communicating with Nasim.

*“Sarvinoz might not be pretty like Manija but she is so different from us. I don’t know how she does it... she has very little fear...I could never do anything like her and I wish I could...”*⁸⁴

Sarvinoz was not considered beautiful in terms of what was classified as beauty by Tajik standards. As any qualities or lack of those are associated with the mother, Sarvinoz’s inability to look after herself similar to other girls, was also blamed on her mother⁸⁵. However, it was not clear whether Sarvinoz intentionally chose to be different from her sisters in order to become closer to her brother. It nevertheless gave her certain power in the family. She was the only female that enjoyed her brother’s company when he was at home while her other sisters felt uncomfortable to even stay in the same room. She was the only one who could discuss movies or share gossip with Nasim, something I did not observe even with his wife. Apart from this, Sarvinoz was also able to influence her brother’s relationship with his wife. Depending on what she told Nasim about his wife that evening, the relationship of the couple was either tense or relaxed. Sarvinoz due to this was feared by her *kelin* but also used by her mother when Nasim’s relationship with his wife needed to be influenced.

Nodira on the other hand was different. She had been morally brought up to be shy and quiet like any other typical Tajik girl. That was exactly how the 10 year old behaved on the surface. Nevertheless, Nodira had her hidden tactics to ensure her interests were also not left behind. In the relationship with Sarvinoz, for example, although Nodira probably was not happy with the amount of work

⁸⁴ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

⁸⁵ Mothers’ role in upbringing the girls is noted throughout the thesis. More details however are provided in chapter 7.

she had to complete at home, she never confronted her older sister openly. Nodira believed that through complying with Sarvinoz she could also influence her brother's relationship towards her:

“... if Sarvinoz is happy with my work then Nasim will be happy too...”⁸⁶

To make Nasim happy with Nodira was an interesting way of displaying the little power Nodira had. The little girl realized the power of her older sister and used it to her own advantage. Complying with Sarvinoz was therefore a way of learning the age hierarchy, but also negotiating a better attitude from Nasim, which was necessary for her social life, as I will demonstrate later. These are the skills Nodira would need in future, when negotiating her position in her husband's family.

Relationship with other women

Apart from her sister Sarvinoz, Nodira had a different relationship with other women in the house. While she still respected those, as older ones and as a sign of respect implemented their orders, these relationships were less based on fear and were shaped accordingly. One person that Nodira was very close with, in the family, was her oldest sister, 17 years old Manija who was getting married. Manija was different from Sarvinoz. Nodira and she had their own secrets. Manija let Nodira wear her lipstick when she was playing with her friends or borrow her dress (although Manija was 7 years older than Nodira and her dresses were rather big for her little sister, I observed Nodira wearing her

⁸⁶ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

older sister's dresses on a few occasions), when Nodira was attending a wedding with her mother. Sarvinoz did not approve this secret sharing and used it against Nodira whilst she could do little to Manija due to her age superiority.

In this relationship between these two sisters, apart from being allies against Sarvinoz, both sisters were at the same time learning important lessons. Manija's protective attitude towards her baby sister, for example, could clearly be interpreted as a mothering relationship. Therefore, it seemed that through protecting and caring for Nodira Manija was learning the art of becoming a future mother, a destiny that awaited her in the very near future. Nodira at the same time learned how to not only fear and comply with elders, but also how to negotiate with those older and find methods of using them for your own interest.

The only person towards whom Nodira had a negative relationship in the family was their *kelin*, Nasim's wife. She was complaining one day while she changed two years old Bahodur's trousers (her brother's son):

*"I have to look after Bahodur. His mother is still washing the clothes. I don't know why she is so slow. My mother always tells her to work faster but she is always slow... and now I have to look after her son. I look after him only because he is my brother's son, otherwise I don't like small children. I will never have children when I grow up..."*⁸⁷

Several important notes can be made from Nodira's quote above. First of all implementing a difficult task of looking after the little boy, she showed her attitude towards her brother. Nodira felt she had to look after this little boy as

⁸⁷ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

part of her respect towards Nasim. The importance of family connection had been socialized to her, where relationships are interconnected. It also however shows the level of decision making the little girl has without breaking the existing norms. Secondly, the quote demonstrates her relationship with their *kelin*. She thus classified her *kelin* as incompetent in performing the expected tasks. I never heard Nodira confront her *kelin* directly, because of the age difference, but she openly expressed her negative attitude towards her brother's wife, finding her incapable and unworthy of her brother whom she worshiped. Although Nodira was a smart little girl one could feel that some of her reactions were dictated by what the adults in the house thought and discussed. This seemed particularly relevant as she once told me a story of how their *kelin*, their brother's wife was chosen. According to Nodira, their mother Nazokat planned to marry her son to her aunt's daughter (her mother's cousin) who was both, according to Nodira, very pretty and a diligent worker. The girl however, got married before they even proposed leaving Nazokat devastated. After taking a long time to choose another *kelin*, Nazokat finally agreed to this girl, who was also a relative but from their father's side. Although her son married the chosen *kelin*, Nazokat never really accepted her and still found faults in everything the *kelin* did.

Nazokat's attitude towards her *kelin*, which she expressed very openly, is internalized by other family members, including 10 years old Nodira. Such scenarios where the *kelin* is treated poorly by the whole family just because her mother-in-law is not satisfied, are very common in Tajikistan⁸⁸. Thus, whilst

⁸⁸ Personal observation.

Nodira's *kelin* never did anything wrong towards Nodira personally, the 10 year old girl already had her opinion developed. The fact that their mother is not happy made Nodira dislike her *kelin*. Influenced by the discourse of the adults, Nodira found this *kelin* useless and not a good fit for her brother.

*“My brother deserves a better wife...someone who can look after his mother. But this one can't even take care of her own children...”*⁸⁹

Even though only 10 years of age, Nodira knew exactly what to expect from a decent *kelin*, which according to Nodira, her own *kelin* failed to be. In a family where family members are intimately connected, the relationship towards each other is shared by loved ones. So here, in this particular relationship, similar to others, it was safe to assume that Nodira learned the significance of having the set of qualities, which were part of her *tarbiya* from such an early age.

The relationship with women in the family, as this section described, was based around the notion of *tarbiya*. Through women, little girls like Nodira, learned how to behave morally when interacting with someone older in age. Here she learned the importance of age hierarchy, how to comply and yet use it for their own benefit without breaking the moral guidelines. Through implementing various domestic chores, executing orders and complying with older family members, Nodira learned such important skills as respect and obedience towards those older in age. At the same time, prioritizing orders, having different relationships with significant others, the 10 years old girl

⁸⁹ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

learned the art of exercising any agency provided within the age hierarchy of such intimate relationships.

6.2 Brothers and appropriate gender behavior

As much as Nodira's relationship was complicated with the women of the household, it was even more complex with the opposite sex. Although with the women the process of moral upbringing or *tarbiya* was straightforward, with the men, particularly her brother Nasim, it was rather hidden. The women ordered Nodira around and her older sister Sarvinoz would ensure she completed her chores in time. If not she would be scolded by Sarvinoz and comforted by Manija. With her brother however, the learning took a different scenario. As we will see in this section, although Nasim engaged Nodira in the most important lesson for her as female, which is moral behaviour when communicating with the opposite sex, Nasim chose a different tactic, which was more hidden. To clarify this last statement, I would like to start this section with an observation.

Fieldwork observation:

One day, Nodira was playing a dressing up game with her friends inside the *havli*. While their mother Nazokat and I were sitting nearby talking, I noticed the girls putting on their mother's best clothes, carrying handbags, wearing lipsticks and adults' high heels. They pretended to be going to a wedding and were having fun. All of a sudden, all the girls became anxious and started running around to find a hiding place. It turned out Nasim, Nodira's 23 years old brother, was back from work earlier this day. He entered the *havli* with his usual crossed eye-brows look. At first, he did not notice the girls and sat on the bench next to his

mother before entering the house. He was sitting there for the whole 10 minutes while Nodira was hiding behind her friends who were not at ease themselves. As soon as he became aware of the girls and their appearance, he asked addressing no one in particular: "*What is going on here?*" His mother tried to cover for the girls saying they are only playing. To what he replied: "*...perhaps they should play kids' games instead? What is this clowning about? Go wash your faces!*"

Such a simple act as children's play possibly did not represent a threat in reality. As it is apparent from this case, Nasim used it to express his authority. He demonstrated his dominance, seeming to be angry and yet choosing simple words without even raising his voice. Yet that was exactly what kept Nodira and her little friends in fear. Nasim thus used the moment to teach Nodira to behave appropriately through playing a strict brother, and Nodira used the case to represent obedience and respect towards Nasim's order.

Nodira chose to behave differently in the company of men depending on their age. Similar to countries with the same values (Kressel, 1992), on the upbringing of younger girls in patriarchal communities, the appropriate behaviour towards men is woven in early. Nodira therefore, as a morally good girl, was shy around older men. She did not address them directly unless there was a good reason for that. Again, due to the special notion of respect towards older people she called all the older males *aka* [older brother] and respected them just as she would her own brother. She was especially careful with her brother's friends as any sign of disrespect towards her brother in the presence of his friends could damage her brother's pride. From what I observed, Nodira did not play with the younger boys of the same age, such as cousins or schoolmates, although she was still able to address them without restraining

herself. This little girl demonstrated the decisions she made regarding her behaviour in the presence of the older men while ignoring the younger ones.

“...no I am not shy of Samir! He is the same age as I am! If he was older than me then my mom would be very annoyed if I joked with him and laughed out so loudly like I did today. Because older men are different, my brother’s friends for example...once Samir is the same age as them I will probably stop talking to him completely!”⁹⁰

As Nodira indicated here, it is both gender and age differences that should be remembered when communicating with the opposite sex. If with the women, it is only the age that had to be respected, in the case with men it is mixed with the gender appropriate behaviour. Samir, from the quote above, was not worth demonstrating the appropriate behaviour to as the dominant figure, because he was yet not at the right age. Choosing therefore who deserved the respect more, Nodira was making a conscious decision necessary for self-protection, as I will discuss later. Although the above quote or even most of what has been presented in this chapter could be described as a ‘gender mask’ by Harris (2004), I view this behaviour as an ability to make certain choices without pretending to be who you are not. Nodira was thus able to act consciously for her own interest.

With her brother, as a result, as the oldest man and thus the authority in the family the relationship was rather demanding. Nodira felt intimidated around Nasim. She made sure her brother was not around when she was laughing with her friends outside or when she was looking at herself in the mirror trying on

⁹⁰ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

different looks or even when she was playing various games. She could not stay in the same room with her brother or any other older men if her mother was not there. She could sit and enjoy a TV show but as soon as her brother entered, she left the room and stayed in the kitchen with her sisters where Sarvinoz took advantage of the situation and constantly commanded her around. This attitude towards her brother was encouraged and strengthened by their mother Nazokat who emphasised the importance of behaving appropriately to keep their brother proud. Nodira therefore, influenced by her mother, chose actions towards her brother that indicated modesty and respect.

“... I never even talk to my brother. He doesn’t talk to me himself, only when he needs something. “Nodira find my socks or bring me some tea, or iron my shirt” – that is all he ever says to me. He is a good brother though – he never shouts at me or hits me, unlike my sister... But I could never disobey my brother or behave in a way that could embarrass him. It would be such a shame...”⁹¹

As this quote indicates, Nasim never punished or even talked to Nodira, but it was the possibility of a punishment that kept Nodira anxious. An expected behaviour was important for both Nodira and her brother as it determined the relationship between them. Although Nodira talked about shame in the quote above, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, she chose to do so, expecting to influence her brother’s relationship towards her.

When I asked Nasim about his relationship with his ten years old sister, he supported the statement made by Nodira. For him looking strict was more important than having to punish Nodira or his other sisters if they acted

⁹¹ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

inappropriately. According to him, he could not chat with Nodira anymore now that she was growing up. He believed that his role as a man was to ensure that Nodira feared the mere prospect of disappointing him.

*“...you know how they say “If somebody is scared of you then he respects you”? I cannot afford joking or laughing with my sisters because they will stop respecting me. I am responsible for them, so I have to act accordingly...”*⁹²

Nasim, thus, confirmed playing his part in the *tarbiya* of his sisters, particularly Nodira. For him fear was a sign of respect and failing to keep his sisters under fear meant losing his authority over them. While Nasim was already a grown up man with a family of his own and his status as a patriarch was well established, which he obviously could not afford to lose, Nodira was only learning and internalizing the importance of being modest and shy around the men,, especially those you love⁹³.

Indeed, Nodira seemed to worship her brother specifically because he was strict and represented an ideal of a “real man” for her. She made fun of her 23 years old cousin, who in her eyes, failed to keep his authority as a patriarch worth of respect. Nodira who was aware of the age and gender hierarchy, acted around this cousin as she was around younger boys, joking and making fun of each other every time he visited. Although Nodira obviously was fond of her cousin, she did not consider him the same dominant man as Nasim.

⁹² Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

⁹³ This is similar to Suad Joseph's (1994) findings.

“...akai llhom is crazy...he is nothing like my aka. I even forget sometimes that he is older, I feel like he is my age. My mother scolds me for my behaviour with llhom. But he is not yet a man; he is just another crazy boy!”⁹⁴

Nodira did not perceive her cousin as a 'real man' because unlike other men of his age, he did not portray authority. He might have decided not to impose fear but rather be cheerful and playful, which was interpreted as failure as a patriarch even by such a little girl as Nodira. Nasim's explanation of his attitude towards his sisters seemed relevant as the case with this cousin proved. Nevertheless, I brought this example here to emphasise once again, how certain gendered behaviour are nourished in the Tajik society. Such values strengthen the importance of participating in each other's *tarbiya* to ensure individuals similar to Nodira grow up into what is perceived a true Tajik woman.

Nasim, as indicated above, had been successful in keeping his status as a strict brother whose sisters feared the possibility of making him unhappy with their behaviour. Nevertheless, the notion of fear seemed to be flexible in his case. While Nodira and her oldest sister Manija received silent treatment from their beloved brother as a sign of constant tension, Sarvinoz as was mentioned earlier, was allowed to enjoy her brother's company as much as she liked. Sarvinoz is not of course, the focus of this chapter but the relationship between Sarvinoz and her brother is worth noting for comparison. I already mentioned the women appreciating Sarvinoz's special power over her brother. According to the women, Sarvinoz was not perceived as a 'proper girl' by Nasim due to her physical look and that is why he chose her as a companion in his family. At this

⁹⁴ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

point now, I would like to explore Nasim's response about the special relationship that bonded him with his sister Sarvinoz.

Compared to his other two sisters, 17 years old Manija and 10 years old Nodira, Nasim considered Sarvinoz of less danger to him. While his two other sisters had to be kept in fear to avoid any wrong-doing, Sarvinoz did not appear a regular girl figure that needed to learn the gendered appropriate behaviour.

*“Sarvinoz is like a brother than a sister... her manners are very manlike, the way she talks or walks... I don't think my mother did a very great job teaching her how to be a woman. Sarvinoz is always untidy with messy hair...I don't like that of course, I feel proud of my sisters being pretty, but at least I don't have to worry about one of them...I feel bad about Sarvinoz, I am afraid she is the one I will have to take care all my life... I feel sorry for her not being a proper girl so I don't want to make things even harder for her...”*⁹⁵

Nasim obviously took pity on his sister for not being “like a real girl” as she did not fit the locally expected frame of a proper female beauty. He even went as far as to expect her not to get any marriage proposals and anticipated looking after her all his life. At the same time however, he, as a very traditional dominant patriarch, perceived Sarvinoz's difference as a benefit for him, as it eased his burden of an additional responsibility. The fact that Sarvinoz was not similar to his other sisters meant he did not need to police her actions.

Nodira's brother, unlike any of her sisters or other women did not teach her any specific tasks, such as cleaning or looking after younger children. Yet,

⁹⁵ Brother, case study, Safedorak.

without her probably realizing it, he taught her the most important role, to act according to her gender around the men. As I demonstrated in this section, Nasim considered himself important in teaching his sisters to fear and thus respect his and therefore male authority. Similar to brother-sister relationships in Lebanon, Nodira in return learned how to behave around loved men and how to earn their affection (Joseph, 1994).

6.3 Evaluation

Nodira's *tarbiya*, which was behaving as a modest and shy young lady through interacting with those older in age and of different gender through her siblings, required policing and evaluation. Both during domestic chores and behaving appropriately her actions were supervised and checked carefully. In case of any wrongdoing, Nodira was punished. The 10 year old however, knew how to improve her situation. This section will demonstrate how Nodira's actions were being policed and evaluated and how the little girl dealt with it.

When at school or outside playing, Nodira was not to forget how to behave appropriately. Although as a child, she enjoyed a certain amount of freedom; she also had to remember some of the boundaries. Thus when outside of the house, Nodira as a girl, growing up to become a woman, could not for example laugh loudly or shake hands with her male schoolmates. She learned from her mother that the way she behaved outside reflected on her brother's status, their family honour and her sisters' marriage prospects. Behaving appropriately, however, as we have seen in this chapter, was what

Nasim as the only man in the household was expected to teach Nodira. Although he was quite effective in his tactics of teaching morality, Nasim was rather laid back when it came to checking his sisters' behaviour, particularly outside of the house. Most of the brothers, as I will demonstrate in chapter 7 consider themselves responsible for ensuring their sisters act morally. Nasim however was at work most of the time so he was not able to check his sisters' behaviour physically, but he did not particularly stress about it even when he was around. Such flexibility could be a result of his "teaching" tactics, where as I mentioned earlier, he believed keeping his sisters in fear of punishment was the best way to keep them within the expected frame. Another explanation as to why he was not worried was probably because he knew Sarvinoz was doing this part of the task for him.

Indeed, Sarvinoz not only made sure that Nodira implemented the household chores appropriately, but she also supervised her little sister's behaviour, particularly outside. Sarvinoz asked Nodira's friends about her actions at school, she kept an eye on what Nodira was wearing and peeked outside often when Nodira was playing nearby. The 10 year old was aware of the supervision and did not deny her anxiety and anger about being constantly watched.

"I am not scared of Sarvinoz, what can she do to me? Hit me? She does it all the time and I am used to it... No I don't even complain about it to my mother, because my mother says listen to your sister, she is older... she might report to

*my brother if I do something wrong and then I will be in a bigger trouble...he will never let me outside anymore!"*⁹⁶

Sarvinoz's watchfulness kept Nodira within the expected moral behaviour. Although Nodira seemed rather angry with her older sister, she realised the danger of failing to behave appropriately. It was not the punishment that Nodira was afraid of, according to the quote above, but the possibility of not being able to spend time with her friends. Losing Nasim's trust in this case, could result in limiting Nodira's freedom. Apart from having limited freedom, not disappointing Nasim was important for Nodira for other reasons as well. The role of the brother in his sisters' life was constantly emphasised to the women in Tajikistan. I have mentioned this role throughout this dissertation, but apart from keeping the family's honour, the brothers were responsible for overall well-being of their sisters (I will return to this question in chapter 8).

Although as I mentioned earlier Nodira never openly confronted Sarvinoz, considering the 'teaching' normal and 'for her own good', she found ways of protecting herself through other means. I described the close relationship Nodira shared with her eldest sister Manija in the earlier section. The special attachment between the two sisters in a way was a survival method, particularly for Nodira. Through choosing to be closer to Manija and excluding Sarvinoz, the two sisters seemingly punished Sarvinoz. Together with her oldest sister, Nodira made fun of Sarvinoz and her un-girly behaviour; they giggled and tickled each other demonstrating to Sarvinoz that she was not part of their friendship. Nodira also used Manija's protection when she wanted to

⁹⁶ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

play with her friends outside but still did not finish her household chores. In this case, Manija offered her help as the oldest sister with more power to excuse Nodira.

*“...we like teasing Sarvinoz... this is her own fault that we are not friends with her. After all Nodira is only a little girl, but Sarvinoz is too harsh with her. I let Nodira do things the way she likes and Sarvinoz gets very mad because she cannot do anything about it. I let Nodira play and do the work later...or might even do the work for her...”*⁹⁷

The tactics chosen by Manija and Nodira against Sarvinoz for her ill treatment was once again possible due to the age hierarchy given by family connections. Both sisters seemed to benefit from such an arrangement. Nodira enjoyed her eldest sister's power. In return, the 10 years old prioritized Manija's request over everyone else's. Nasim, on the other hand, obviously encouraged this policing over Nodira. Moreover, according to their mother Nazokat, Nasim expected Sarvinoz also to supervise their eldest sister Manija's behaviour. Sarvinoz even if aware of the age difference between her older sister and herself found it important to keep a close eye on both sisters. Manija at the same time, knew that Sarvinoz could do little to harm her because of the age difference. Hence, Manija was in a position to send Sarvinoz to the local bazar or shops, any time she needed to keep her younger sister out of her business. In addition, Manija's perfect reputation among the neighbours gained her more respect in the household. Using her reputation, Manija was able to confront Sarvinoz and expected support from both her brother and her mother.

⁹⁷ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

“...no matter how Sarvinoz wants to spy on Manija she can do very little. Manija has nothing to hide... in addition she is older which makes Sarvinoz’s job a lot harder...Nasim and I will always support Manija, especially now that she is getting married within a few weeks! She has done nothing but make us proud!”

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The significance of the age hierarchy in this family played in Manija’s favour, thus leaving Nodira the only victim of Sarvinoz’s supervision. In addition, Nazokat indicated her trust in Manija’s behaviour due to her perfect morality that earned her marriage proposal, which put Manija in a higher position both within her family and within community.

Supervision was thus a part of the *tarbiya*. It was important to not only teach Nodira the age and gender appropriate behaviour, but also to make sure she implemented those. Such tension certainly kept little Nodira anxious. However, as Nodira was a product of this system with its complicated relationship and interpersonal responsibility and agency she knew perfectly well how to find a way to ensure a better position for herself as I also argue in chapter 8. Thus through complex sibling interaction Nodira was not only under constant policing and threat but also found support and comfort.

6.4 Punishment and affection

⁹⁸ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

We have seen so far in this chapter how *tarbiya* had been part of the siblings' relationship. The siblings most of the time unconsciously shaped each other's character and behaviour, and were fundamental for structuring one another's future roles. I also described in the previous sections through 10 years old Nodira and I will return to this question again in chapter 8, how negotiation and self-interest were possible within the age and gender dominant culture. What I have not shown yet is the role of the parents in this *tarbiya*. In this section, therefore I would like to analyse Nazokat's role as, the household's only parent and her contribution in Nodira's *tarbiya*. In doing so, I would like to focus on the method used by most Tajik families in bringing up the children, corporal punishment⁹⁹.

In chapter five, I briefly discussed the notion of love and affection in a Tajik society. I demonstrated that although love, care and affection exist in Tajik families just as in any other type of families, openly showing signs of these feeling is not considered important and appropriate. Family members demonstrate love through other means, such as respect, providing timely *tarbiya*, participating in each other's lives on a daily basis and assisting one another in shaping the Tajik self. It is thus clear that affection is not for demonstration purposes towards all family members, but particularly children. The belief was that children could be 'spoiled' if they are constantly reminded about the warm feelings towards them. As the relation among adults and

⁹⁹ As I noted in chapter 2, the issue of domestic violence is common in Tajikistan. By terming it as a 'corporal punishment', I am therefore not diminishing its severity, neither am I looking for justification of this practice. Punishment or violence within a family however is viewed by the Tajiks themselves as 'corporal punishment'. I therefore use this term as more culturally appropriate, particularly when it comes to younger children, like Nodira.

children in Tajik society is purely that of a teacher and student, as this chapter described¹⁰⁰, the teaching is best done through strict guidance and rules.

Nazokat as a mother had a friendly relationship with her daughters in overall. Even if most of the *tarbiya* was implemented by siblings, it was her responsibility to make sure hierarchy was kept and the norms were followed. For her, the small but significant part she played in bringing up her daughters could be learned through rigorous discipline. According to Nazokat, if she was too 'mild' with her children the consequences could be destructive. During my stay with their family, I did not observe Nazokat herself practicing corporal punishment to 'teach her children'. She nevertheless encouraged such punishment by the older siblings. Hence, Nazokat did not have to implement the corporal punishment. She knew her children would take care of it on her behalf.

*“The children grow up and do everything for you... they make sure they act appropriately and do the household chores appropriately... if not then they know themselves what measures should be taken... I did punish them when I was younger. I used to get so angry that I could beat them and not stop until I see their blood...that is why they are still scared of me.”*¹⁰¹

The quote illustrates Nazokat's methods bringing up her daughters. Although she punished her children severely before, she did not need to do it now, as she passed this responsibility, along with others, to her children. The siblings, as we already saw in this chapter, knew how to use their age and gender to apply

¹⁰⁰ Also noted by Stephan, 2010; Roche, 2009; Harris, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

force when the younger sibling needed to be punished. For her punishing her children meant, they learned the lesson.

Just as I did not observe punishment, demonstrating affection openly was also rare in Nazokat's and her daughters' relationship. Nodira therefore, although a child, found it odd that parents and children could hug or kiss each other demonstratively. Nodira did not expect tenderness this way; she was used to receiving it through other more practical ways. The everyday involvement of her sister's in her upbringing, the interest of her brother in preparing her for the future role, as a Tajik woman and her own participation in family matters are a few of such indications. According to Nazokat:

*"Nodira is a good girl. She is very shy, just like a girl should be. And she knows she is too big for all the things that smaller children get...but she gets what she deserves, we let her play with her friends and spend some time outside. If she crosses the line, she knows I have no mercy..."*¹⁰²

Nazokat pointed out Nodira's age as inappropriate for affection. She believed Nodira received enough attention appropriate for this age, while other signs of affection were only for 'smaller children'. Punishment, in comparison, as Nazokat also emphasised in the quote above, is to remind Nodira to remain within moral guidelines. While Nazokat did not punish or demonstrate affection openly herself, Sarvinoz made a good use of it. Again due to birth order and gender hierarchy in this intimate relationship, Nodira was hit by her sister on

¹⁰² Mother, case study, Safedorak.

several occasions, in my presence. The punishment was then explained as *'for her own good'* insisting, *'she will only be thankful later'*.

*"Punishment is part of the bringing up... Nodira is a little girl so if we, as her family, don't teach her she will never learn. If Sarvinoz is not able to tame Nodira then she tells me and I take measures. But mostly she is doing a great job..."*¹⁰³

Nazokat, clearly believed Sarvinoz was taking the right measures towards Nodira when necessary. She mentioned the link between teaching and punishment above. It is thus believed that children learn best when they are in fear of being punished. The same tactics were also used by Nassim, as noted above. This cultural norm in bringing up children might appear harsh to western eyes but is considered effective as it passes from one generation to another. At the same time, love is woven into this type of moral upbringing. Corporal punishment is thus even one of the way of demonstrating this affection, as it is guided by the responsibility of bringing up a decent Tajik individual, which explains the terms such as *'she will be grateful later'*, or *'for her own good'*. In fact, grown up Tajik people, the majority of whom went through this type of teaching in their families believed the corporal punishment served them well. Most agreed they would not have become the person they are if it was not for the severe punishment.

In this section, therefore I analysed such important ways of upbringing as punishment and affection. In general, punishment and other ways of demonstrating affection were believed to bring up better individuals. Openly

¹⁰³ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

showing affection through verbal or physical contact was not necessary, as it could spoil the child. Affection, as a result could be demonstrated through other not less meaningful ways, such as respect, lifelong care for each other and participation in each other's daily activities. Punishment in contrast to affection was encouraged to be openly practiced. Identified as strict method of upbringing, corporal punishment could teach such morally important behaviour as modesty, shyness and other gender appropriate behaviour.

Conclusion

This focus of this chapter was on a little 10 years old girl Nodira. I demonstrated how through complicated family dynamics and siblings' relationships, Nodira's *tarbiya* was taking place. *Tarbiya* is an important part of Tajik's upbringing, where adults are responsible for socializing children and guiding them to the 'right path'. The 'right path', according to Stephan (2008) is closely associated with being a Muslim as religion provides moral guidance. Although I agree with this argument, I do not focus on the religious side of the morality and rather demonstrate the system through which it is provided. *Tarbiya* gives a privilege to older people to engage in the process of teaching, instructing and punishing younger people regardless of whether they are related or not. In the case of Nodira however, I focused only on siblings' relationships demonstrating Nodira's learning journey that takes place through every day activities.

This age of a young girl, when she was still a child but old enough to implement and to understand certain priorities was an important step in

preparing the little girls similar to Nodira for the future role of the mother and wife. As the marriage age starts earlier for girls similar to Nodira in Tajikistan, the complicated process of learning the required skills and behaviour also starts earlier. By taking orders from her older sister and behaving appropriately around her brother, it was at this age that Nodira started learning the importance of age and gender. Being aware of such skills at this age, she could perfect them later and enter the marriage market as early as her sister. If she misses the opportunity to master those skills at this age, it will naturally lower her chance of receiving a marriage proposal within the short window frame discussed in the earlier chapter. Nodira learned that to grow up as a proper Tajik woman and live in a Tajik society, she must stay within moral guidelines when interacting with those who are older and of an opposite sex. I also described in this chapter how the teaching shaped the gendered nature of those who were in a position to impose *tarbiya*, namely Nodira's siblings. While Nodira learned how to respect an older person, execute the orders and comply, her sisters learned how to use their age to influence the youngsters' behaviour and enjoy the power.

At the same time when Nodira was engaged in the process of learning the gender appropriate behaviour through interacting with her brother, Nasim, although an established patriarch used the moment to strengthen his authority. Using Joseph's patriarchal connectivity (1999), I thus tried to indicate the importance of family relationships and the way they shaped each other as separate individuals starting from an early age. Seeing each other as an extension of oneself, siblings in this family viewed the upbringing of their youngest sister Nodira as their responsibility. The way Nodira would turn out as

a Tajik woman depended on how well her brother and sisters guided her towards 'what is right'. *Tarbiya* here thus also demonstrates the lifelong care among family members.

Apart from *tarbiya* I demonstrated where possible Nodira's limited but nevertheless existing expression of agency. I showed the level of power the 10 years old was given without resisting the family order. I will return to the question of female agency in more detail in chapter 8. In this chapter, it was possible to see Nodira's ability to negotiate and make rational decisions that were in accordance with the dominance and yet ensure her own interests. Not only was Nodira learning the important lessons on how to behave with older people and with men to become a qualified *kelin* one day, but she was also learning how to live within the family values and these were shaped to give Nodira the agency she needed.

The previous chapter described the significance of marriage and the main reasons for early marriage occurrence in the country. This chapter demonstrated the strategies Tajik families used to shape a 'proper girl' who is ready to undertake the responsibility of a wife and *kelin* one day. I will move on to the next age cycle in the following chapter where I describe the learning process of the young girls, as they grow older. Thus, *tarbiya* started at an early age of 10 does not stop there. It becomes more complicated as the girls advanced to the next stage of learning in their early adolescence years.

Chapter 7

The advanced preparation stage

Q: Why is it so important for the girls to clean and cook whole day long?

A: Who else is going to do the work for them? If she takes breaks so often how is she ever going to keep her husband?

Q: How to keep a husband then? What do you need to do?

A: It is not so much about keeping a husband at this point. It is more important to get one first!

The above conversation took place one evening during my fieldwork with a family in Varzob. After speaking with the women in the focus group, I intended to speak to a few girls but was not able to do so because the girls were all busy with the household chores. As it was right after dinner, there were dishes to be washed and the backyard to be swept. Domestic work, as I probably always knew being a Tajik myself, but observed once again, was similar to holding a full time job for the women. As the conversation above indicates, domestic work was not only a way to keep a husband but also to find one. However, having decent domestic skills was not enough to enter the marriage market and receive a marriage proposal within the limited period. Such qualities as cooking and cleaning had to be paired with an excellent reputation as a morally good individual who knew how to behave appropriately in accordance with one's gender.

I call the stage that is the focus of this chapter 'advanced preparation for the marriage' stage. It is a time when girls are no longer perceived as children but they are not old enough yet to get married. To enter the marriage market it is important to first of all go through this preparation stage. Hence, the years of early adolescence or the 'preparation stage' is a crucial time for the girls and their families. This chapter therefore argues that in order to successfully ensure a marriage proposal within the narrow marriage window in the last years, the families strategize their approach of attracting potential marriage proposals. The notion of *tarbiya* [moral education] that started in childhood, continues and takes more significant meaning at this stage as the girls learn necessary skills and characteristics that shape the attributes of a 'desirable' *kelin*. It should be noted here again that the strategies used by the families and the importance of mastering certain skills for the girls might not be a new phenomenon. But with the marriage market starting so early for girls in recent years, this chapter demonstrates in more details the anxiety of the families and the girls to be proficient in time for the marriage market in order not to miss the opportunity of finding a decent husband.

In analysing the family strategies, I draw again on the theory of patriarchal connectivity to describe how certain skills and values are socialized to the girls through relationships and interactions of family members. According to patriarchal connectivity, people are connected in societies similar to Tajikistan for social, economic and political survival and see themselves as an extension or in connection to family members (Joseph, 1999). Family members in this type of families are responsible for each other and therefore are actively engaged in shaping each other's personality to prepare the true culturally and

morally appropriate self that is ready for the society where they live (Joseph, 1994). However, while the previous chapter analysed the siblings' interaction in the process of *tarbiya*, this one analyses the role of women in preparing the girls as future brides and arranging the marriage.

This chapter is structured in the following way. The first section 7.1 will focus on the selection of *kelin* and will demonstrate the characteristics necessary for grooms' families before classifying a girl as marriageable. The rest of the chapter will then describe how the brides' families being aware of the grooms' families' requirements, refine the girls' skills, some of which started at an earlier age. I will separately, in section 7.2, discuss the importance of pure reputation for girls and their families and the importance of moral and appropriate behaviour; the art of becoming a domestic 'goddess' will be the focus of a separate section; in section 7.3, as an important part of the current dissertation, I will analyse school attendance.

7.1 The demand for younger brides

The marriage proposal comes from the groom's family. With certain interests in mind, the families of the grooms interviewed for this study, preferred younger *kelins*, as this section will demonstrate. It is thus safe to argue, that it was the grooms' families that pushed girls' marriage down. As a result, similar to demand and supply theory in economics, the demand for younger *kelins* pressures the girls' family to supply girls of a younger age. An important role in the grooms' families in finding a suitable girl and arranging a marriage is

dedicated to the mother. In this section therefore, I will also analyse the significance of mothers-in-law in determining the girls' future¹⁰⁴.

When a young man was ready for marriage, arranging his marriage became a family business in this study. It was almost never up to the young men to find himself a partner he preferred. Although unfortunately I was not able to speak to the grooms about how much input they actually had in arranging their own marriage, my findings suggest that the majority of the marriages were initiated and arranged by the grooms' mothers. This is unlike Roche's finding, where she demonstrated how through various socio-economic and political changes in Tajikistan, young men were able to gain some freedom from parental control and thus had power in choosing the bride for themselves (Roche, 2010). Perhaps if I interviewed the young men, the argument about how their marriages were arranged could take a different turn. However, as it was out of the scope of this study to speak to the grooms, mainly because the study explores girls' marriage age and was therefore interested in contacting the brides' families, the mothers of the grooms interviewed during the focus group are the main source I am using here to describe the preferences for selecting a bride.

The mothers in fact had an enormous power and the last word in selecting the bride, according to the respondents of this study. During focus groups with the women and during the interviews with the families, the question of a 'desirable' *kelin* never left the discussion. Conversations about the faults of

¹⁰⁴ As the study was focused on the girls' families and their response to early marriage, mother in laws were not separately interviewed. This section is based on the findings from focus group discussions.

the current *kelin* and selection of a new better one were among the major topics of women's concern.

As part of the patriarchal connectivity theory¹⁰⁵, a *kelin* was selected not only as a marriage partner for the young man, but also as a new family member entering the new household to undertake certain responsibilities towards the rest of her new family. Moreover, the *kelin* was also to implement the woman's duties in her new household and assist, or in some ways even replace her mother-in-law. As her mother-in-law would grow older, the *kelin* would finally take her place in becoming a second dominant person. For these reasons, *kelin* and mother-in-law were expected to spend a lot of time together. Consequently, a mother-in-law is interested in choosing the best *kelin* available.

The mother-in-law typically chose a *kelin* that would suit her requirements as a woman first of all. A desired *kelin* was the one with certain characteristics: (a) she had to take care of her parents-in-law as she would look after her own parents; (b) she needed to demonstrate wonderful domestic skills, such as cleaning and cooking for the whole family; (c) and in addition she had to have a pure reputation concerning her behaviour as a young woman. With these factors in mind, the mother-in-law, devoted most of her time to finding the desirable *kelin*. Women would use their connections, their web of relations and other women in extended family to search for a potential *kelin*. The latter is usually identified based on her reputation in the community where she lived¹⁰⁶. As I mentioned in chapter 5, marriages were usually arranged with the families

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 2 above.

¹⁰⁶ Reputation is in fact a major factor in determining the fate of the girls. I will therefore focus on reputation in more details later in this chapter.

from the same community, village or region. The only family, among my cases, whose daughter-in-law was from another region, Kulob, constantly blamed the girl for her place of birth whenever she failed to implement the domestic chores the expected way saying: “*well she is Kulobi...*”, as if referring to her place of birth would explain it all. Families believed that girls in other regions are socialized differently and might not fit within the expectations of a particular area. Thus, girls from urban areas were seen by the rural families as spoiled with the little household chores they do, while girls from rural areas were seen by urban based families as wild and less sophisticated than the city girls.

Kelin could be recommended by a female relative who personally knew the girl and her family or heard about the potential *kelin* from other women, as one with decent reputation. For example, Sayora, a 48 years old woman I met during the focus groups, found a *kelin* for her sister. She met Mavjuda a 17 years old girl, who according to Sayora: ‘*such girls are rare today. We could not afford loosing such an opportunity*’¹⁰⁷. Although girls I have met during this study worked hard to enter the list of ‘desirable’ *kelin*, the grooms’ side believed finding a decent *kelin* was ‘rare’ as the last quote indicates. Should such a ‘rare’ girl come across, she was not to be lost. Mavjuda from the case above was thus arranged to marry Sayora’s 19 years old nephew. It should be noted, for a boy to get married at the age of 19 was rather uncommon as men were believed to mature later.

When searching for *kelin* the mother in laws preferred younger girls. As I mentioned earlier in chapter five, such preference was particularly strengthened

¹⁰⁷ Sister, focus group, Safedorak.

in the last years due to migration of young men of nubile age to countries, such as Russia in search for jobs. The families of these young Tajik men, rushed to marry them to a Tajik girl before they departed¹⁰⁸. For the families, the marriage of their son before departure not only meant his transition into adult life or domestication as Roche noted (2010), but also to ensure they had somebody to look after them. As a woman moves into her husband's house and stays there even if her husband is away, the mother-in-law expected a bride she could shape to fit her requirements. Those younger in age were anticipated to adjust easier to a new house with new rules. Younger girls were easier to manage and to mould the way the mother-in-law preferred in all cases, but particularly in the cases with migrant husbands.

“The younger the girl, the easier it is to teach her what you want... maybe she learned something from her mother at home, but here we do things differently. To stay in this house without her husband she has to the work the way I am used to.”¹⁰⁹

“Young girls are full of energy...they don't get tired easily as we do. They are stronger and faster.”¹¹⁰

Kelin was therefore to look after the new family members and to perform the household chores. The younger she was the more energy she had to manage the various domestic tasks. Younger girls also had not fully developed their own personalities yet and as a result could be 'brought up' to suit the requirements of the mother-in-law.

¹⁰⁸ Also noted by Roche, 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Mother-in-law, focus group, Varzob.

¹¹⁰ Mother-in-law, focus group, Varzob.

Another important factor in choosing a *kelin* was to check her family background. While the girls' families expected a proposal from families with a more advantageous position, the grooms' family also looked for a 'good' family when arranging a marriage. The better the status of the family the more desirable it was to become close relatives with them. If the chosen family was not already related then marriages were arranged among the families of similar background and socio-economic status. Although different in cases of relative marriage, a financially poor family from my sample, for example, usually could not afford a marriage proposal to a girl from the richer circle, while the economically better off family was reluctant to become related to the struggling family. Apart from this, families looked at the overall history of the family, the ancestors, what was the status of the family in the village or community and so on.

Apart from excellent moral behaviour and mastering domestic skills, women preferred a *kelin* who was domesticated early on and did not attend a school. The women believed that school was not necessary for girls joining their family, as they did not need 'professors' but rather modest and hardworking girls. According to women, a girl who was still at school at the age of 17 could mean only two things: either her family was careless and should be avoided; or that the girl was not morally good, as she preferred to spend her time outside.

"Why would I want a kelin who is at school until her wedding day? She rather stays at home and learns something useful. After all I am not interested in a

professor, what difference does it make to me if she knows how to read or write?”¹¹¹

“If the girl is still at school, what will people think? That nobody in her family cares about her...or she would rather spend time outside... who wants such a girl in their house?”¹¹²

Education was deprecated and was not considered important for the groom’s family. This was similar to the girls and their families’ beliefs as already mentioned in the earlier chapters. The girls were expected to have skills needed in the household but their intellectual abilities were of little importance, even undesirable, as the first quote demonstrates. Apart from being unnecessary, the girls’ education did not matter for the grooms’ families. The girls would stay at home after marriage and families did not anticipate any financial input from the girls. As mentioned in chapter five, I have met a few girls who prior to their marriage worked at such places as the local beauty salons but left their jobs upon their marriage. Madina, whose case I presented in chapter five, stopped working at the beauty salon after her marriage but went back after her divorce. According to Madina, she was “divorced by my-mother-in-law” because of her inability to conceive a child. Indeed, not only the mother in laws could decide whom to marry but they also had authority in deciding the future of the girls’ marriage.

“I like my kelin... my sisters complain about her a lot. They think my house is so filthy after I married my son to her, that she is not a good

¹¹¹ Mother-in-law, focus group, Dushanbe.

¹¹² Mother, focus group, Safedorak.

*housekeeper and all... But I don't care. It is my kelin! I personally chose her although my son said he did not like her. She might not be a great cook and I have never tried really good food since she started cooking in this house, but she is a great company. My son said he doesn't want her any more. And one day he took her back to her house with all her belongings. I cried and cried... and my husband told my son that he is making his mother ill. He told him to go and bring her back. Now she is back and my life is normal again. It is ok, he will get used to her...besides he can spend time outside with other girls, I don't care..."*¹¹³

The neighbours discussed this case several times during my fieldwork. The neighbours believed that although Soima's *kelin* obviously lacked good housekeeper skills, she was very clever. She knew exactly who to build a relationship with in her new house. Having such influence over her mother-in-law, the assumption was that this *kelin* secured her stay forever. She was once heard bragging to one of the neighbours that *taloq* [divorce] did not concern her, because her mother-in-law would not let this happen. The older woman chose her as company and despite her failure as a domestic worker, her mother-in-law was ready to turn a blind eye to such major limitations. It should be noted that cases similar to this one were rare. Not all mother in laws were ready to accept their *kelins* if they lacked the requisite skills.

Surprisingly, in selecting a *kelin*, one of the qualities that mattered the least was their physical appearance¹¹⁴. It would have probably been different if I

¹¹³ Mother-in-law, focus group, Dushanbe.

¹¹⁴ The qualities of a bride are also mentioned in Nourzhanov and Bleuer, 2013.

interviewed the grooms but for their mothers the appearance of the girls was the last criteria.

“Who cares what the kelin looks like? My son might care as he is to sleep next to her, but for me the uglier the better! At least she would not spend too much time on herself knowing that she cannot fix what God has given her and will work instead...”¹¹⁵

For most mothers-in-laws the physical appearance of a *kelin* did not matter when arranging a marriage. A pretty girl did not mean a better domestic worker thus making physical attractiveness the last on the list of required qualities for a *kelin*.

Young men’s families arranged marriage where a mother-in-law played a significant role. When selecting a *kelin*, the mother-in-law favoured younger girls, as they were viewed as more obedient and had not yet developed their own personalities, which made it easier to shape them the way the mother-in-law wanted. Early marriage therefore was promoted by these women. As their preference for younger girls grew, the families with the girls found themselves under the pressure of preparing their daughters for the marriage earlier than before. The selection of a *kelin* however, was a complicated process by itself. It involved checking the family background, the girls’ reputation among her neighbours as a good domestic worker and as a person with good moral conduct. Now that the requirements during the selection process are clear, I will discuss the girls and their families’ strategies in today’s marriage market in tailoring the required skills, so their daughters would fit the expectations and

¹¹⁵ Mother-in-law, focus group, Dushanbe.

would not miss out their opportunity to get married within such a narrow timeframe.

7.2 The strategies of the girls' families

From the previous section, it should be clear that the age of marriage for the girls is pushed down by the grooms' family, particularly by the mother. For the reasons stated earlier, families looking for *kelin* today give preference for those who are younger. Such a demand for younger *kelin*, made families prepare their daughters for marriage earlier than before, for example, during the Soviet period. In the following sections, I will analyze the strategies of the families in preparing the girls to enter the marriage market. This section also explores the role of the women in the marriage process, focusing here on how mothers and daughters are connected through the learning process and how they are evaluated through each other. Mothers are considered vitally important in bringing up girls in Tajikistan, as the mother is the first teacher and the first role model for girls.

Pure reputation

One of the important factors in increasing the girl's marriageability was for her to have a pure reputation, as we saw earlier. Each bride had to possess and demonstrate to the neighbours and community the qualities that classified her as a worthy person for the marriage. Each girl, therefore, before entering the marriage market had to have excellent domestic skills and wonderful moral

behaviour. The lack or the abundance of domestic skills was also a determinant of the reputation, and I will return to this question later. However, the moral behaviour that was linked with virginity was of special importance. I will discuss how the moral behaviour was learned in a separate section and will dedicate this small section to only demonstrate the significance of a good reputation.

To take the discussion of pure reputation further and explain it clearly, I would like to start this section with a case study.

Fieldwork observation:

I knew Sitora for a very long time as she is the younger sister of one of my good friends who I will call Parvina here. When I was back in Dushanbe in the spring of 2012, Sitora who was 17 years old now was getting married. I considered interviewing Sitora and her family for the purpose of my research but did not have a chance because her whole family was very busy preparing for the wedding. All the necessities for the bride were purchased; the list included the best clothes and the most expensive bedroom furniture, an advanced washing machine and a number of the most beautiful carpets. The preparation was in full swing. Sitora was very happy, as was her family, especially her father. He was talking constantly about how proud he is of Sitora and how anxious he is to hold his first grandchild. However, unfortunately the wedding never happened.

A week before the wedding ceremony, the grooms' family sent a message withdrawing their marriage proposal to Sitora. They did not explain the reasons. It was clear to everyone, such a decision could only be based on gossip that the groom's family probably overheard. As we found out later, Sitora had the imprudence to chat in an 'extremely' friendly manner with one of the groom's friends who interpreted her friendliness as "too much". He started talking about Sitora as the unworthy bride for his friend; the neighbours picked up on this and

spread the news to all the relatives of the groom who in turn pressured the groom and his family to withdraw their proposal. The groom and his family knew they would suffer little from it but they will cause major distress to Sitara and her family with such a decision.

The decision apparently was a shock for Sitara's family. Weeks following the event, no one heard or saw any family member anywhere. They kept their doors locked and limited their communication with the outside world; I could not reach my friend on the phone for months. Only when I finished my fieldwork and was ready to go back to the UK, my friend called me to say goodbye. I learned from her that Sitara attempted to commit suicide and was therefore sent to Russia. According to my friend, "it is better to keep Sitara away from us and the people. Enough ruining our family!"

This case demonstrates all of the important matters relevant to discussion of reputation. First of all Sitara's behaviour immediately affected her reputation which became powerful in deciding her fate with regards to the most important step in a Tajik family, the marriage. Considering that the marriage market in recent years starts early but also ends quickly, Sitara's chances of finding another husband was thus diminished. Such an effect was possible due to the honour and shame system functioning in Tajikistan¹¹⁶. Similar to other countries with the same values such a system functions because of the importance of belonging to a family where each person as a representative of the family can disgrace his whole kin with his immoral actions (Al-Khayyat, 1990). Although both men and women in the family should therefore avoid damaging the family's honour, the women receive special attention in this

¹¹⁶ I described briefly honour and shame notion in Tajikistan in chapter 2.

matter¹¹⁷. According to the honour and shame system, therefore, in Tajikistan the girls are expected to remain virgin until they get married. It is this quality that Sitara put under question by her 'inappropriate' behaviour, which resulted in ruining her reputation. Although nobody talked about virginity openly during my field research, it was perceived as given. The assumption of whether a girl was a virgin or not was made based on her behaviour and conduct, as it was believed that a virgin was modest and shy. It was with this conduct that virginity was displayed and through this display, girls conformed to the image that has been prescribed to them. Sitara therefore put her virginity under question, by interacting with the groom's friend in an inappropriate manner and was as a result regarded as immodest and shameless.

The honour and shame system, according to Harris (2004), exists only because of the community's expectations towards men and women. Harris (2004) focuses on honour and shame in details and argues that both men and women display the gendered expected role in order to keep the existing social order. While that might be true, for me morality was also a way of socially existing in Tajikistan. When the girls behaved morally they also contributed to their future by having a good reputation and thus increasing their chances of receiving a marriage proposal. If the girls chose to behave differently than it is accepted within the morality, existing under such rules became very challenging, as it is clear from Sitara's case.

Another important factor that should be mentioned here is the effect of Sitara's behaviour on her family. Although the focus of this chapter is mostly on

¹¹⁷ For more details on honour and shame in Tajikistan, please see Harris, 2004.

girls like Sitara and increasing their marriageability by keeping a good reputation, the influence on the family is also important to consider, because family relationships are at the core of the theory used for this dissertation. As I have already mentioned, in Tajik families, a family as a unit has more value than the value of separate individuals, where family members see each other as an extension of themselves. Consequently, any conduct that puts the girls' chastity into question stigmatizes the girl and influences her family as a whole. It represented the failure of the men to take care of their women, as Baxter demonstrated in the case of Palestinian families (Baxter, 2007). The neighbours targeted Sitara's father more than they targeted the main victim and perpetrator Sitara herself, because he was blamed for failing in his responsibility and not properly looking after Sitara before it was too late.

The last matter to draw from the case study above is the power of gossip. For a young girl like Sitara gossip could have significant implications. While families worked hard to prepare the girls for the early marriage, through building their skills and improving their reputation, this reputation could be easily destroyed if there was even a slight suspicion of a shameful act. The reputation could thus be ruined through a gossip in Tajikistan¹¹⁸. Gossip had a significant power and kept families in continuous fear of 'what will people say' as the case above demonstrated.

Public watchfulness was a factor that kept the girls conscious about their actions. According to previous researchers, however, as long as quality, such as obedience is displayed in public parental honour is safe. Roche (2010), for

¹¹⁸ Also noted by Harris, 2004.

example, argues that Tajik parents prefer not knowing their children's deeds when those are away from home, to avoid taking measures. Although it is an interesting point of view, it is difficult to imagine knowing the importance of reputation and the neighbours' watchfulness. At least in the case of the girls, such an argument does not always seem to work. In this study, the girls were closely supervised by older people, both men and women alike, no matter if it was a close family member or distant. As a result, keeping the family unaware of certain behaviour was almost impossible. In addition, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, the relationship within the family was not only about power distribution as has been described. People viewed each other as an extension of significant others and believed it was their duty to actively engage in each other's lives. Consequently not only family members knew about each other's acts, but even engaged in policing behaviour and deeds of individuals. This policing helped them to take quick measures in cases the young person, in this case the girls, chose the 'wrong path'.

Moral behaviour

As a good reputation identified the girls' future, appropriate moral behaviour, which was the main factor for determining the reputation, was an element at the centre of bringing up the girls and increasing their marriageability. Behaving morally concerned both girls and boys starting early in childhood (discussed in chapter 6) but it received more attention at the adolescent stage. I described in chapter five that at this stage girls and boys

were believed to be less able to control their own behaviour, making this age 'a time of most mistakes'.

As I discussed earlier, for the girls morality meant modesty, shyness and displaying virginity. The girls I met tried to avoid laughing or talking loudly, wearing inappropriate clothing, not having eye contact when communicating with someone, spending less time in public and so on. Similar to women in Iraq (Al-Khayyat, 1990), the list of things the girls found inappropriate was so long that when I asked the girls what they are allowed to do, it was difficult to come up with an answer.

*"Everything is sharm [shameful] ... I can't even think of something that I can do. It would probably be easier if you asked me about what I can't do..."*¹¹⁹

Indeed girls received constant lectures on how to appropriately dress, sit, talk and once I observed a mother commenting on her daughter's laughter:

*"... what kind of laughing is this? You are a girl and girls cannot laugh like donkeys. HA-HA-HA. What are you doing laughing so loudly? A girl should be modest, your voice should be quiet and your laughter should not be heard. Also cover your mouth with your hand when you are laughing..."*¹²⁰

Mother, in fact, was the person directly responsible for the good conduct of the girls, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

As in case of Nodira, who was the focus of chapter six, early from childhood the girls learned how to behave within morally accepted guidelines

¹¹⁹ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

¹²⁰ Mother, case study, Varzob.

through interacting with their siblings, particularly their brothers. Most of the girls at this age, reported change in their brothers' behaviour. According to the girls their brothers almost never communicated with them directly apart from short orders, such as "go home!" when met in public or "make me a tea!" This is similar to Nasim's action from the previous chapter, when by minimizing his communication with his sisters, he demonstrated his authority and strictness. At this stage, the brothers also become the main decision makers regarding how much freedom the girl can have or how much time she could spend to socialize with her friends¹²¹.

*"My brother does not let me go anywhere... he does not say that to me, but then starts bothering my mom if I am somewhere, arguing with her about letting me go. That is why my mom calls me immediately as my brother returns home and I quickly come back... otherwise both my mom and I will be in trouble..."*¹²²

Although in some cases, a brother did not directly influence the girls' behaviour, he did so indirectly, through other members of the family, as in the case above through the mother. The girl from the other side, as in the last quote, relied on her mother's support in negotiating her interest with her brother.

Most of the girls I met therefore understood the meaning of good moral behaviour as a benefit for themselves. They thus without a doubt realised the importance of morality on their brothers' relationship towards them, which was in their own interest (I will return to this question in chapter eight). The girls also realised that behaving within the frame where everybody should follow the non-

¹²¹ The policing of the girls by their brothers has been also noted by Roche, 2010.

¹²² Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

written rules was to increase their marriage chances in an early and narrow marriage market. Nevertheless, I met girls who decided not to follow these rules exactly. A few of these cases will be discussed in chapter eight.

Domestic chores

Domestic tasks were always part of the girls' lives starting from early childhood as demonstrated in chapter six. Although in childhood the reason behind having the little girls engaged in domestic duties was to teach them the first gender assigned duties, once the girls reach the age of 12, the domestic chores gained more significance. The girls' ability and often willingness to perform the work at the highest level made them a practical asset that their families were proud to possess and the grooms' families were looking forward to employ. The groom's family, as I described earlier in this chapter, along with other requirements, such as pure reputation, looked for a *kelin* with excellent domestic skills thus forcing the brides' families, particularly the mothers, to take careful measure to ensure their daughters mastered the art of domestic work before they entered the narrow in recent years, marriage market.

The girls although never had the luxury to sleep late in the mornings, at this age they were the first to get up in the morning and start the chores while everybody else was still in bed. At this point, the work around the house increased and was not limited to a few chores as when they were younger, but rather included all the possible work. Now the household appearance and tidiness was associated with the girl's ability to do the housework. The house should be kept clean, dishes and clothes washed, the garden and livestock

taken care of. Although nobody deliberately came and checked the tidiness of the house, and sometimes hardly anyone entered the *havli* for the whole day, it was still important to keep it clean.

In addition to the cleaning ability, the cooking skills were constantly measured and evaluated. The Tajik national holidays were the perfect time for displaying the cooking skills in public. During these holidays, each household had a huge *dastorkhon* [table cloth] with all kinds of dishes and bakery. The *dastorkhon* is placed on the floor surrounded by *kurpacha* and cushions to make the guests comfortable. The *dastorkhon* is also a demonstration of Tajik hospitality. The *dastorkhon* was even more important during the celebrations. Neighbours and relatives visited each other at the national holidays, sat around *dastorkhon*, tried the food and shared the latest gossip. The women of the household and especially the girls, who put so much effort in preparing and displaying various types of food, were praised accordingly.

While men enjoyed the food and left, the women took note of everything they tried and afterwards categorized the girl who prepared the feast. All of the girls in this age group, I have met, regardless of their social and educational background, were able to cook and bake a variety of traditional Tajik and non-traditional food. However, only some of the girls were known as *qobil* [diligent workers] among the neighbours and friends for their ability to perform domestic tasks, at the best level, which was a great pride for their family. In addition to the necessary domestic chores, explained so far, it was beneficial for girls to have other skills as well. The more skills they had the higher their chances of being included in the *qobil* list. That is why most of the girls I spoke to could not only keep their house in perfect tidiness and cooked amazing dishes, but they

also were able to sew clothes or knit or do traditional embroidery. Such skills were usually just for family purposes and only a few girls used them to make small money, as I demonstrated earlier in chapter five.

In those locations where I carried out my research, both in urban and rural areas, it was easy for the women to identify those girls, who stood a good chance of getting married within the marriage market based on their domestic abilities. The domestic abilities could determine not only whether the girl received a marriage proposal but also when she was more likely to receive one.

*“...my niece is a wonderful cook! Everybody knows how to cook of course but she has a special talent... she is just not lucky enough! She has always been unlucky! Why nobody notices her skills and comes with a proposal yet? Poor girl and she is turning 17 this year...”*¹²³

*“Apai Karomat’s daughter got 3 marriage proposals! It is all because she has such wonderful housekeeping skills, her house is always sparkling clean, and one could drink a water from their floor, that is how clean it is!”*¹²⁴

According to these quotes, domestic skills and good housekeeping were important in determining the girls’ marriage opportunities and ensuring she did not miss the narrow marriage window. In both cases, the families did everything they could to teach their daughters all the necessary skills, but probably the failure of the first family to demonstrate those skills to get the neighbours talking and spreading the gossip about the ability of the girl, delayed the marriage proposals. The second case was already strengthened by the fact that it was

¹²³ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

¹²⁴ Mother, focus group, Safedorak.

provided by the neighbour, thus showing the awareness of the people about the ability of the girl, which might be the reason for the number of marriage proposals the girl received.

The girls were aware of the competition among them. Madina, for example, who was 17 years old, had only one friend, her cousin Malika. They rarely saw each other as both were busy but they often met and walked to the bazar to buy food. Madina's cousin was a year younger but she was well known among the neighbours for her excellent domestic skills. The only reason, according to the neighbours that Malika was still not married was because her father promised her to a relative who did not yet come to ask for her hand.

Below is Madina's reflection:

"Malika is a good friend. Yes, I think she is a lot better than I am. She is also prettier. Her house is always so clean and the food is ready. I do not remember one time I went to visit her and she did not have the food ready. I don't know how she does it. I am working as hard as I can, but I think I am just slower. It has been a pure luck that I am getting married before her."¹²⁵

What Madina represented here was the sense of a competition that occurred among the girls naturally. Although all of them were able to perform each domestic chores, the quality of these chores also counted. Madina believed it was not her domestic ability but her luck that she was getting married before the well known for her excellent skills Malika. The quote above also indicates how

¹²⁵ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

these girls were not forced to learn the skills but rather chose rationally to master those to become a better domestic worker than their friends.

Nevertheless, the girls did not become experts by themselves. As I found out during this research, the mothers played a significant role in bringing up the girls. For the mothers it was the responsibility to bring up the girl so that she could match the already highly risen standards for the girls to attract the marriage proposals. The fathers and other men therefore left such a big responsibility to the mothers and interfered only in extreme cases.

Mothers and daughters spent days together cooking, shopping or crafting (such as sewing the traditional clothes or knitting). Spending so much time together, these two people became close to each other as one might expect. This relationship however was mostly based on the role of a teacher (the mother) and a student (the girl). *Tarbiya* [moral education] through being a strict teacher was more important than demonstrating open signs of affection, as noted earlier. Similar to Iraqi women from Al-Khayyat's study (1990), Tajiks believed a daughter learned how to behave from her own mother or 'daughter takes after her mother', as was mentioned several times in focus groups.

"I agreed to take this kelin only because of her mother's reputation. Her mother is a very good and well respected woman. She worked at the government when she was young and she is very authoritative. Even the way she walks is all about power and beauty. Very strong woman. I thought her children and her daughter especially must be really good... respectful and obedient... but my

kelin... pffffff all she knows is standing in front of the mirror and looking at herself! Who cares how you look if you are useless! ¹²⁶

In this case, it was not the girl's reputation but her mother's that made the family choose this particular *kelin*. The daughters were therefore closely associated with their mother's abilities and skills. In addition, a mother was also the person responsible for how the girls master the art of domestic task. Hence, the failure of the girl to perform one task or another was blamed on her mother. During the focus groups, the women complained about their *kelin* not being a perfect housewife and blaming it on their mothers.

"I talked to her mother (kelin's mother) and I told her to come and collect her daughter with all her belongings! I told her looking straight into her eyes: "what did you teach your daughter? Is she a princess at home? Because we do not need princesses here!" With her irresponsibility, she destroyed her daughter's life! I don't want her and I am sure nobody else will ever want her!" ¹²⁷

The mother was held responsible for the dissatisfaction of the mother-in-law in the quote above. The girl obviously failed to prove herself as a good *kelin* and was classified therefore as 'unwanted' because her mother did not implement her role as a teacher to the desired level.

As this section demonstrated, the families of the girls had to take into account the requirements of the grooms' families and spend significant time and

¹²⁶ Mother-in-law, focus group, Dushanbe.

¹²⁷ Mother-in-law, focus group, Dushanbe.

effort to prepare the girls for the marriage at an earlier age than before. Although the strategies used by the families and the girls themselves to be 'desirable' *kelin*, under the current pressure of the earlier age of marriage, the process of acquiring the new skills starts sooner. At this stage, the morality of the girls' behaviour was checked and their reputation was established accordingly. As the girls' main moral characteristic was to be sexually pure before the marriage, a small mistake questioning her virginity could result in gossip and consequently destroy her reputation. Moreover, as the girls were expected to contribute and even undertake domestic work at their husbands' houses, apart from morality, the art of domestic work and a housekeeper was on the list of the qualities the girl learned at this point. The better the girl was trained to clean and cook the more 'wanted' she was for the mother-in-law searching for a young *kelin*. Most of such training took place at home and was performed by the mothers, who were not only responsible for the girls' ability to master the art of domestic chores, but also were held liable for the morality of the girls.

7.3 Social life and formal education

I have discussed so far, the girls at the age of 12 to 15 and thus at the age of 'advanced preparation' for the marriage that starts early today in the country. The preparation at this stage meant the girls were busy perfecting their skills and behaviour to increase their chances of getting married within the early and narrow marriage market. Moreover, at this age, the reputation of the girls became of interest to the whole community where the acts of the girls were

supervised and policed not only by the family members but also by neighbours and other community members. With such important changes, the girls' social life outside the house, became insignificant and at times, completely unnecessary.

Girls in this study limited spending time outside as they did before when they were younger. Their circle of friends narrowed down to a few cousins or only one or two very close friends living nearby.

Most of the girls at this point preferred to stay at home. As I will demonstrate in chapter eight, in many cases girls themselves decided to limit their communication and social life realising the effect it might have on a potential marriage proposal. In cases of attending a wedding or going to the bazar to buy food, the girls had to ask for permission. Depending on the event, the permission was given by a mother or by a mother in consultation with a brother if it was a big event such as attending celebrations or weddings.

*"I usually ask my mum, as I am too shy to ask my brother if I want to go somewhere... my mum then talks to my brother and sometimes persuades him to let me go..."*¹²⁸

Once again, the brothers' role in the girls' lives as the main controllers is emphasised. The girls' social life at this point became a matter of other family members' business. Deciding how to spend their leisure time never belonged to the girls initially as we saw in chapter six, but at this age, it also involved more

¹²⁸ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

members and had more significant meaning than before, as it could determine the girls' future.

In addition to socializing with their friends, the majority of the girls I met during field research, particularly in the village, stopped attending school at this age. Once again, it should be noted that Tajikistan is very different from one region to another. Therefore, generalizations should be avoided. At this point however, it is worth mentioning the difference in the decisions made by the girls concerning school in urban and rural areas. In the urban area, Dushanbe, the number of the girls dropping out of school was comparatively smaller, although it still existed. From 19 girls I spoke to during the fieldwork, only 8 girls between 15 and 17 still attended school. Seven of those were in Dushanbe and only one in the village. The general attitude towards the school obviously influenced the level of the girls' participation at the school in Dushanbe. Four girls from Dushanbe, similar to the rest of the young women in this study, were getting married within a few months. They, however, decided to stay at school up to the last moment. The rest of the girls, the other three in Dushanbe, stayed at school because even though they had received a marriage proposal, their families were still in the process of negotiating the marriage arrangement. The girl from Safedorak village however was a different case. She was almost the only girl among her friends who still attended school. Unfortunately, even if she received a marriage proposal, she was known as a 'mad girl', due to mental health problems and therefore her stay at school was interpreted as part of her "craziness"¹²⁹. Nevertheless, the more traditional girls quitted school once they

¹²⁹ Mental health is not recognized in Tajikistan unfortunately. Therefore, people who are mentally disabled are treated poorly. More research should be conducted in the country to cover mental health issues.

were classified as reaching the 'important' age. A similar observation was made by Whitsel (2011), according to whom, traditional expectations were the main reason for the girls to quit school at the adolescent age. In this study, mostly in the village, the girls chose to spend more time at home prioritizing domestic tasks over formal education. Most of them were concerned that the household chores were left unattended while they were at school, which was highly undesirable and damaging for their reputation.

"I cannot go to school. There is too much work to be done here, at home. Who will do the chores while I am at school? And what if someone comes to our house and sees all this mess? What will they say about me?"¹³⁰

The domestic work evaluated them in the eyes of other people so this work was more important than going to school. Having certain qualities meant the girls could be classified as proper Tajik women, equipped with the skills each respected Tajik woman needed to possess.

Attending school also meant spending more time outside of the house and thus being vulnerable to potential gossip. School was a place where the girls spend more time around the opposite sex and were thus more exposed to the possibility of being victims of the neighbours' 'talk'. Girls and their parents were aware of this and did not see the school as a place deserving such a sacrifice.

¹³⁰ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

“...if Nigora spends so much time with the boys in the school, what would the neighbours say? What will I do with a girl who has a bad reputation?”¹³¹

Keeping the girls at home was thus seen as more advantageous in comparison to attending the school. If the girls were at home, neighbours did not have a reason to talk and both the parents and the girls felt safer. Apart from the prioritization of domestic chores and avoiding gossip, neither the girls nor their parents saw the benefit of the school over what they were taught at home. The girls joked about it, saying that their future mother-in-law would not care whether they knew the map of the world or spoke English. The parents on the other hand believed education was not only useless but it could also become a barrier towards the girls' happiness.

“...let's assume my daughters go to school... then what? What can they do with their education? It would not feed them and as a result they will lose all the marriageable boys by the time they are done studying!”¹³²

“Many girls at the age of 12 start dropping out from school. I am a teacher but even I don't let my daughter to go to school anymore, because she is the only girl there...”¹³³

“Girls are registered at the school, but they do not attend it. We call them sometimes when somebody comes for inspection, for example from UNICEF or the government. But other than that... almost no teenage girls are at school”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Mother, case study, Varzob.

¹³² Father, case study, Safedorak.

¹³³ Teacher, Varzob.

¹³⁴ School director, Safedorak.

Respondents of this study did not believe the school could result in any added value for the girls, as it would not even 'feed' them, referring to unavailability of the jobs.

Another essential point that needs to be emphasised here is the role of the school itself in prioritizing the traditional role of the girls over formal education. Teachers interviewed as part of this research sample, not only supported families and the girls in quitting the school, but also even promoted it. The majority of the teachers and even school principals were the first to withdraw their daughters from school once they reached the age of marriage, showing an example for the rest of the families.

The teachers also commented that they did not prioritise the girls' education even when they were still at school. Not only did they believe the boys were more capable of learning the difficult subjects, but they also confessed they gave little importance to the girls overall involvement in the class and her success in certain subjects in general. The only subject the girls received a proper attention and training was *mehnat* [work, labour]. This is a subject where boys and girls are separately taught certain gender appropriate skills. Boys thus learn how to use domestic tools to fix or build objects, such as chairs or tables. Girls at the same time learned how to cook, sew or knit. School therefore played its part in promoting the gender roles and thus encouraging girls to get married instead of attending school.

The learning process or *tarbiya* was however still important for girls. Therefore with the formal education losing its impact on the girls, the religious lessons took their place (Stephan, 2009). Many girls I met both in rural and

urban areas attended private religious lessons provided by religious women, called *bibikhalifa*. I imagined these lessons were mostly about religion and Islam and was surprised at how little the focus was on religion itself. Instead, *bibikhalifa* spoke to them about the skills discussed in this section, such as the art of being a decent wife. The religious teachers' lessons were also focused on improving domestic skills and the morality of the girls, such as modesty, shyness and chastity¹³⁵.

This section focused on the social life and formal education for the girls at such important stage of their lives as entering the marriage market. As demonstrated, Tajik girls in this study limited their circle of friends and most importantly stopped school attendance. As formal education is not compulsory in the country any longer, parents were able to withdraw their daughters from school at this age to avoid possible gossip that might stain the girl's reputation and ruin their chances of marriage¹³⁶. Moreover, the girls prioritized the domestic chores over formal education, because learning certain skills would classify them as proper Tajik woman. Such a decision of both the parents and the girls is supported by the school itself. Teachers agreed and at times even promoted the girls' traditional role encouraging them to engage into more 'appropriate' knowledge than the one taught at schools.

¹³⁵ See Stephan, 2009 for more on religious lessons.

¹³⁶ The reason for taking the girls out of the school for the purpose of marriage was also noted by Whitsel, 2011.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated the strategy employed by the families to increase the marriage chances of their daughters. In doing so I focused on the role of women in the process of marriage. The chapter therefore started from analysing the grooms' families and the role of mother-in-law in arranging marriage for her son. As I argued in this section, the preference for younger brides started from these women who look for younger and less experienced girls. I then looked in to the girls' families with a particular focus on the mother and her role in upbringing the girls. Here again, I emphasised that although the process of teaching skills, such as appropriate behaviour and excellent domestic skills seems to have always existed, the pressure from the grooms' families for younger brides forced the girls' families to start the process of teaching at an earlier and faster pace. The learning process or *tarbiya* had always been part of the upbringing of Tajik children. While the younger girls, such as Nodira in chapter six, learned the age and gender appropriate behaviour for the first time, the girls in this chapter had to advance the knowledge through tailoring their reputation and domestic skills. This chapter therefore focused on girls in their early adolescence age of up to 15-16 years or the pre-marriage stage, which for the purpose of this thesis I refer to as the marriage 'advanced preparation stage'.

Most of the respondents in this study believed marriage was the only option for securing the future of the majority of the young girls, as demonstrated in chapter five. However to successfully enter the marriage market, particularly at such an early age, the girls had to be equipped with certain characteristics and skills that would classify them as the 'desirable' *kelin*. In this chapter, I also

discussed the role of the formal education in emphasising the traditional roles of the girls. Girls were encouraged to stay at home rather than attend schools by both the families and the schoolteachers.

The morality and domestic skills were learned through complex interaction with the family members where each person contributed to the upbringing of the girls in one way or another. I continued demonstrating throughout this chapter the complexity of learning the required qualities as a result of family relationships, similar to chapter six. I once again mentioned the role of the brothers in controlling behaviour of the girls particularly outside of the house. Besides, mothers became directly responsible for the learned skills and morality of these girls. At the same time however, the learning would not be possible without the girls' active participation. I mentioned several times the agency of the females in these last two chapters as they engaged in mastering certain skills and behaviour and negotiating their social life where possible. I will now discuss the women's agency in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

An embedded agency

“I listen to my brother not only because I am afraid of him... although I might be a little... but mostly I have to do it for myself. I need his protection. One day he will come and help me because I have been a good sister to him and I have shown nothing but respect towards him...”¹³⁷

“I do not do everything I am told...unless I agree with it...”¹³⁸

This chapter argues that women in Tajik society are not powerless. While it could seem that early marriage was chosen for them, in reality the young girls were capable of taking an active part in shaping their own lives. When describing the patriarchal structure and gender dynamics in contexts similar to Tajikistan, the question of resistance is usually assumed or expected. Drawing on Judith Butler’s work, it is believed that where a patriarchy exists, women could not possibly accept the structure that oppresses them and therefore are expected to express resistance in any form. As direct resistance is usually described as impossible under such authority, women, to protest somehow, are described as manipulative and calculative in their relationships with the dominant power. Collette Harris describes the resistance in Tajikistan using the term ‘gendered mask’ (Harris, 2004). For her, both Tajik men and women wear the ‘mask’ to perform expected gendered behaviour. The mask allows both genders to hide their true selves and play the desired role, which men and women alike refuse to internalize. As argued in chapter two, I believe that the

¹³⁷ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

¹³⁸ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

mask described by Harris is a rather universal tool as it is not culture specific. In a way, Tajik men and women might be wearing a gendered mask just as all of us do no matter if in Tajikistan or any other country. For me however, in the Tajik context, the mask is not necessary. The young girls in this study were not performing different roles when communicating with their brothers and/or sisters but they were living their lives, the only way they knew how. Hence, the young girls in Tajikistan were conscious, self-interested individuals, who did not necessarily desire to free themselves from the dominance but used what was given by the family ties to make individual choices.

This is not to claim an equality between the sexes in Tajikistan or deny the existence of manipulation (similar to Baxter, 2007). Just like everywhere, including the west, the inequality between the sexes was very much present in Tajikistan and men and women alike used each other for their own benefits. As Baxter (2007) however, I would like to demonstrate how within the patriarchal connectivity or in the context of family interests, what could seem to be resistance was in fact an embedded agency. By agency here, I mean the capacity to act for one's interest. Embedded agency is therefore, an ability to shape one's life through the means already existing in the dominant structure, namely intimate relationships and close connections among the family members. The agency in this context was socially and culturally constructed. Most of the women's desire thus was framed within the norms and available resources. I will demonstrate in this chapter how the girls using the existing age and gender hierarchy to negotiate their choices of what socially but also economically became important – the marriage at an early age. I will also show how the girls' not only did not resist but even competed among each other to

get the marriage proposal, as it became a source of demonstrating their excellence as an established Tajik woman.

I draw on several theories in this chapter¹³⁹. First of all, this chapter is the continuation of demonstrating the importance of connections and relationships in Tajik families. It should not therefore be viewed as separate theory but as an extension of the patriarchal connectivity theory (Joseph, 1999) used throughout the thesis. To develop the notion of agency further however, I draw upon Saba Mahmood's work on agency where she argues against the universality of 'desire'. (Mahmood, 2001). Mahmood, in her work on the Egyptian Islamic revival movement suggests a different approach towards the feminist theories such as those by Judith Butler, where agency is represented as the capacity to resist the dominant structure. Mahmood argues against such interpretation as universal indicating that women in her work involved in the religious movement actively shape their desire through embodied practices associated with religiousness in Islam (such as veiling). Thus, agency for these women does not come from freedom, according to her, but is rather formed by structures of subordination. In other words, the decision of these women to become pious is possible only through the symbols of subordination¹⁴⁰. Additionally I refer to Baxter's work (2007) in this chapter, where she demonstrates the privileged position of women in Palestine given to them by the honour and shame system, a system, which is often described as oppressive. Baxter's work is an excellent example of how within close family relationships, the women are able to make self-interested decisions using the given honour and shame framework. Similar

¹³⁹ See chapter 2 for detailed analysis of the theories used in this thesis.

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 2 for detailed description of Mahmood's work and other relevant theories.

to her work, I demonstrate what benefits the system offers for the young girls. Although the girls in this study were not 'privileged' (Baxter, 2007), they were nevertheless in a position to influence or even change the course of their lives. I, therefore, argue in this chapter that the girls' ability to make informed decisions in regards to their marriage was possible specifically due to the family type they lived in.

This chapter is organized in the following way: Firstly, I describe the level of agency the young girls were able to practice at various stages of their lives described in the earlier chapters. I will once again return to Nodira and her sisters from chapter six and girls from other case studies to discuss their in the decisions made 'for them'. I will then focus separately on the marriage, as the main focus of this thesis, to demonstrate participation or negotiation of the girls in the marriage process. The last section of this chapter will look into a group of young women, different from the previously discussed girls, where I will show the variety and flexibility of agency depending on the availability of other opportunities, such as education or employment and the negotiation of these women to return to the marriage market.

8.1 Women's agency in the Tajik context

The first question I was asked when presenting my work for the first time at a conference, was on resistance. I spoke about the marriage practices and the girls' apprenticeship before they enter the marriage market. The fact that these girls lived under the dominant system and followed the unwritten rules seemed to question their docility and sincerity. The impossibility of accepting

authority was naturally assumed and I was expected to bring examples of the oppositions demonstrated by the girls at some point. Yet I had an issue with the word 'resistance' as I imagined most of the girls living in agreement with what seemed to be a 'cruel' life style. I struggled with the word resistance until I realised why the system fitted the world of the Tajik girls. The existing family type was a framework, which allowed certain set of decisions that would not have been possible under other conditions. The girls were never forced to accept the decisions they did not favour exactly because the system allowed them to interact with each other and through each other to express their interests and to fulfil their desires. Thus in the patriarchal connectivity, the young Tajik women, who seemed to have low status, were in fact active participators or shapers of their own lives.

I came across girls, during my fieldwork, who did not necessarily resist the dominance under which they lived. From what I observed, the girls were neither under complete dominance nor authority at all. Neither were they self-centred and manipulative as is implied by several scholars, as I indicated in the theoretical chapter. The girls I met starting from the little girl Nodira in chapter six, to older girls in chapters five and seven were not forced all the way to do what those older or of an opposite sex wanted them to do, but instead through implementing the instructions and respecting the age or the gender, acted in their own interest. Therefore, the agency, or the ability to act for oneself, no matter what the age or situation, had always been part of the girls' upbringing as it had been embedded in the social context in which the girls grew up.

Nevertheless, I cannot state that all the Tajik individuals had the same experience. I cannot deny the existence of such people who completely

disagreed with the values of their family and society. Probably such people exist. However, I did not meet them during the fieldwork or even during my life in Tajikistan. I, however, came across people, who stated they were against the traditional values, nevertheless actively engaged in them. The few girls discussed in the last section of this chapter, who lived a different life and thus seemed to deny such morally important factors as modesty and shyness, in fact never abandoned such values. They valued the importance of family inter-connections and similarly expected to acquire a certain status with the marriage. As a result, these 'different' women followed almost the same rules as we will see later.

Other types of women, who chose to behave 'immorally', such as Nargis, whose case I will bring later in this chapter, exercised their agency on a different level. Nargis, did not exactly behave within the appropriate scheme, making her older sister and brother jointly punish her. Such girls preferred to make choices that affected not only them through loss of reputation but also their families (I will return to this to clarify later). Although it should be noted that the two later groups of girls were less common than the traditional girls, at least in this research. The difference in the choices the girls made indicates certain flexibility allowed by the family type. To take this point further, this section will focus on each previously discussed stages of the young girls' lives, such as docility towards siblings, particularly brothers, learning various skills and appropriate moral behaviour and domestication, to describe the girls' ability to act for their own interests.

Interaction with siblings

Indeed if we look at the previous chapters, it is clear that throughout various stages the girls' own interest had always been present. Starting early in childhood the girls engaged in learning the gender specific roles, which involved authority from those older in age and of an opposite gender. The system allowed the girls, such as Nodira' sisters (in chapter 6) to learn the appropriate gendered behaviour and the age and gender hierarchy by demonstrating power over those who are younger, which would not be possible under a different family type. Hence, Nodira, as the youngest in the family, received constant orders from her older sisters and brother and was scolded constantly. Nodira, as a little girl had her own power. She was aware of the age and gender hierarchy and used it for her own advantage. This little girl strategically chose to become closer with her oldest sister Manija, as we have seen from chapter six. She prioritized Manija' instructions and did those with special diligence. The reason behind such diligence was Nodira's recognition of her sister as a partner or a protector against intimidation by her sister Sarvinoz. As Nodira stated: *"when Manija gets married I will have to find another protector from Sarvinoz"*¹⁴¹. Nodira thus had a rational plan possible within the family connections. . When ignoring Sarvinoz's orders or deliberately disobeying her, Nodira demonstrated her little power over Sarvinoz given to her by a shield built within the family for self-protection.

The same rational decision we could observe from Nodira's relationship with her brother Nasim. Nodira looked after her brother's son, obeyed he brother's commands and behaved appropriately, which taught her gender

¹⁴¹ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

appropriate behaviour. She, however, also performed these actions because she had her own interest in obliging her brother. The little girl worked to gain Nasim's trust and through it more freedom and protection. Her actions, therefore, once again demonstrated the rational decision to behave within the set framework to expect and claim the protection promised to her by the structure¹⁴².

"I have only one aka and I want him to trust me. Manija says trust from Nasim is important, because he is our protector today and in the future." ¹⁴³

Nasim was identified as a future protector, which Nodira, not through manipulation but through following Nasim's expectations, was hoping to gain. She thus chose to act for her interest but at the same time without damaging the status of the significant other, namely Nasim in this case.

Obedying the men, particularly brothers constantly controlling and policing the girls' behaviour and freedom, was a point where authority and dominance became visible, and agency appeared less possible. Similar to Nodira, however, the girls obeyed their brothers because of the expected or existing belief in protection. Roche (2010) demonstrated a similar relationship between brothers and sisters, where brothers were viewed as protectors. Some of the girls in this study who did not have brothers or a male protection, hence were seen as vulnerable and were compared to *'sheep with no shepherd'*, where girls as *'sheep'* lacked guidance and protection of the *'shepherd'* their brothers. The brother had to protect the women in the household from their childhood up to

¹⁴² This is similar to what Kandiyoti demonstrates in *'patriarchal bargain'* (1988).

¹⁴³ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

their marriage and even after. They were to ensure nobody physically, verbally or economically put their sisters down. Therefore, while Nodira possibly did consider her brother's honour when behaving appropriately, as I mentioned earlier, she also did so to get his affection. After all, he was the only male protector that could be identified by the little girl.

The notion of the protection is clearly identified under the honour and shame system, which I briefly discussed in chapters two and seven. Under this ideology, honour is associated with the men who could be dishonoured by the women's inappropriate behaviour, which is another way of interpreting the men's inability to protect his women. In other words, one of ways in which women could dishonour men and thus bring shame to the whole family depended on how well the brothers were able to protect their sisters. Baxter (2007) analyses in her work the Palestinian honour and shame ideology, where she argues that the structure of authority gives privilege and power to women and responsibilities and vulnerabilities to men. The brothers therefore are to support financially or socially, guide and protect their sisters. The women's well-being is a pride for the males' honour as Baxter indicates. Similar to Baxter's argument, the girls observed in this research, as also noted above, obeyed their brothers in return for the protection and guidance and thus increased their brothers' respect in the community or within their friends.

Similar to Palestinian women though mentioned above, the Tajik women chose to express their agency or privilege in different ways that either strengthened or damaged the honour of their brothers. Some girls as Sitara in chapter seven, made choices that were viewed as 'selfish' or 'self-centred' as it influenced her father's honour. The decisions made by such girls, or those who

chose to behave to cherish the men's honour were both brought up under the same authority, but as individuals interpreted and therefore acted upon differently. The two quotes demonstrated below can clarify this point.

*“If the girl cares about her family or her brother, she will get the same respect and protection back. But most of the girls are stupid and selfish, they think they will remain young forever... tomorrow when she is 30 and still not married, that is when she realises how stupid she was...and her poor brother will have to look after her for the rest of her life!”*¹⁴⁴

*“By obeying my brother I am showing him my respect...and I expect to see the same from him...if my husband doesn't treat me right or beats me, I know my brother can say “hey, don't behave like that towards her, she deserves better life than that”*¹⁴⁵

These quotes show the girls' ability to understand and make choices that influenced them as well as their family members. The brothers were the protectors in the cases of a marriage dispute and they were expected to take care of their sisters if those failed to get married at all. Brothers, therefore, were the available source for the girls to rely on within the family type existing in Tajikistan. . Men were expected to fulfil their duties regardless of the choices women made. In cases when the girls' choice affected not only men but also other women in the family, more actions were taken. Often these actions were initiated women themselves. The following case study is an example of this.

Fieldwork observation:

¹⁴⁴ Mother, focus group, Dushanbe.

¹⁴⁵ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

Zarrina who was 18 years old and getting married soon had a sister 17 years old Nargis. Nargis was very different from most of the girls around with her behaviour. While nobody questioned Nargis's virginity, her behaviour provoked gossip in the neighbourhood. Unpleasant comments about Nargis created a pressure for her family. Nargis did not seem to care, as she put on her make up in the morning and disappeared for the whole day leaving her sister and mother worried about her whereabouts and thinking of excuses to explain her father and brother about she was. . Her father Islom worked in bazar and was rarely home so he knew little about what was happening. Their brother Ismat however, according to Zarrina was very irritated with Nargis's behaviour. Zarrina felt sorry for Ismat and suspected he heard rumours about Nargis, because she believed hiding an information "this big" was not possible. Besides Zarrina was worried about what her future husband and his family would think if they heard the gossip. Zarrina was worried they might cancel the wedding altogether. Later, that month, when I came back from one of my weekend trips to Dushanbe, I found out that after one of her mysterious disappearance, when Nargis was brought back home in a car, Zarrina and her brother Ismat forcedly locked Nargis her in a cellar.

This case shows several aspects important for this chapter. First of all the effect of one family member's inappropriate behaviour on the rest of the family. Nargis's choice to be different from the rest of the traditional girls could be interpreted as a failure of her brother to look after his sisters. Besides, Nargis's sister Zarrina felt endangered as a bride, because the behaviour of one person in the family could stain her reputation. As a result, Zarrina not only policed her sister's behaviour but also even contributed to punishing Nargis. Both sisters in this case are an example of how women were able to choose the action that suits their interest the best. Zarrina as the 'good' one ensured her

sister behaved according to the expectations, keeping the current norms and protecting her future marriage from being ruined. Nargis, from the other side, with her 'selfish' behaviour chose to prioritize social life over family values. As I mentioned several times, the interest of a family as a unit was more important than that of an individual, Nargis's behaviour, therefore was outside of the socially constructed agency and thus was considered inappropriate. Another important factor that should be mentioned from this case is the violence towards Nargis. Although violence is out of the scope of the current study, I have emphasised its prevalence in a Tajik society. The form of violence I am describing here, which occurs towards an unmarried woman and thus by her own family, is framed by the Tajiks as 'corporal punishment'¹⁴⁶.

Learning the skills

As the girls grew up and entered the pre-marriage preparation stage described in chapter seven, the level of exercised agency increased along with responsibilities. At this stage, the girls' skills of domestic art and moral behaviour were refined to make them attractive and desirable future *kelins* and to increase their marriageability chances. This stage was full of teaching, policing and competition with each other. The girls, however, were not forced to engage in the learning process of necessary skills. While there might be some who did not wish to learn any of the lessons at this stage, I did not come across such girls during this research. Most of the girls, as proper Tajik women, no

¹⁴⁶ I speak about violence briefly in chapter 2. Violence in the context of Tajikistan is discussed by Haarr, 2007 and 2010.

matter what ambitions and choices they followed, as with the girls in the last section of this chapter, possessed certain domestic skills and try to stay within morally accepted norms. The moral behaviour and its implication were discussed above in relationship with brothers, so I will not focus on those any more. The decision to learn the skills, however, were made by the girls as part of their transition into adulthood.

*“Each Tajik girl should know at least how to cook 5 traditional meals...”*¹⁴⁷

*“What else is a Tajik girl known for? Her ability to cook and her ability to be a good hostess. If a house doesn’t have a good hostess, it doesn’t have a soul.”*¹⁴⁸

The women’s ability to perform domestic chores was similar to the men’s ability to provide financially for his family in Tajikistan. Hence, the inability to perform the gendered expected norm, which in the case of men was earning money feminized the men (also noted by Harris, particularly in her last work Harris, 2011). Such cases were demonstrated in similar contexts. In Nigeria for example, the feminization of the young men resulted in unwillingness of the young girls to marry such men, which postponed the transition of the men into adulthood (Masquelier, 2005). The significance of possessing specific skills no matter what ambitions the Tajik girls had was therefore, part of becoming proper Tajik women. Nevertheless, the women could choose the level of their ability to perform the domestic chores as part of their agency demonstration. I thus saw

¹⁴⁷ Brother, case study, Dushanbe.

¹⁴⁸ Sister, focus group, Safedorak.

the girls who worked diligently, known as *qobil* and those who learned the skills just as a survival kit.

The learned skills as part of becoming proper Tajik women thus were socially constructed, as they were to acquire the sense of self-achievement, particularly when the skills were constantly checked. The typical Tajik woman, irrelevant of her family's social and economic background, was the one in a traditional dress, with nice makeup, at least one piece of golden jewellery, who although modest was always ready to prove her worthiness as a wonderful hostess. The tidiness of the house and the abundance of food on *dastrakhon* during celebrations was associated with the hostess's ability to perform the gendered skills (also indicated in chapter 7). The girls competed with each other demonstrating better skills in cooking a particular dish or knowledge of variety of recipes. The hard work was usually paid off by the marriage proposal that a diligent girl received first, thus making the marriage a final prize for those who looked for self-fulfilment through the marriage.

*“No my mother only tells me how to do things... but she doesn't force me to do those... I think nobody does really. I just do it... I have always done it. I always hunt for new recipes. The more you know the better... I cannot imagine not knowing such simple things...”*¹⁴⁹

*“The better you are at cooking and cleaning and behaving the sooner you get married. I am not a princess; nobody is going to do it for me when I get married.”*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

¹⁵⁰ Daughter, case study, Varzob.

These quotes represent the interest of the young girls in possessing certain skills. Perhaps they were pushed at the beginning to perform certain tasks, but the decision to go further and 'hunt for recipes' was solely made by Mukarram. Perfecting domestic skills would end up in getting the first marriage proposal among their friends, but it was also necessary for after the marriage, as Nigora believed. Excellence in domestic arts was hence a tool chosen by the girls for achieving certain goals, whether it was getting married, becoming the 'goddess' of domestic work or simply fitting within the frame of being a proper Tajik woman.

Social life

The 'seclusion' or limiting the girls' social life at this stage was yet another controversial point against women's agency under the existing authority. How can the young girls make choices when they were obviously suffering from seclusion? Keeping the girls inside the house could have been enforced on girls in this study at some point. From spending time outside socializing with peers when they were little, the girls, upon getting older, ended up being isolated. Time spent outside required permission from now on and the number of their friends became limited (as described in chapter seven). The most obvious and dramatic example of limiting social life was the girls' dropping out of school at the age of adolescence, which drew the attention of both scholars and international organizations working in the country (UNICEF, 2003, Whitsel, 2011). 'Seclusion', however, similar to some other gender related questions discussed above, was welcomed and at times prioritized or volunteered by most of girls observed for this study. The decision to limit the life

'outside of the house' was socially constructed as it could influence the course of the final goal of the young girls, the marriage.

I showed in the previous chapters the attitude of both the families and the girls towards education in the places I conducted this research. As I argued earlier, the decision to quit the school was although made by the families was supported and at times promoted by the state and the school itself. Most of the girls and their parents believed that the school did not provide the girls with any practical skill necessary for future life and at times could even hinder the girls' happiness by ruining the only possible way to future security, the marriage. With the marriage market starting at the early age of 15, staying at school up to the age of 17 automatically meant missing out the chance for qualifying as a potential bride. Apart from the age, the morality of the girls was under question if they chose to stay at school and thus spent time in the company of unrelated men. Not only the girls did not learn any 'useful-for-the-future skills' at school but they could also fall behind in learning the important skills of domestic art, which was more necessary for future endeavour.

In the light of the reasons mentioned above, staying at home was prioritized by the majority of girls over formal education in this study. In chapter seven, I mentioned a few examples of school versus 'staying at home', but I want to bring another case study in here, explaining the various factors influencing the girls' decision to quit school. I would like to mention however, that similar decisions could probably have been different under the context where education is promoted and considered beneficial. Under the current social and economic context and the state rhetoric, however the decision of the

girls to quit school was within their goal of becoming a proper Tajik woman and finding a 'good' husband.

Fieldwork observation:

Mukaddas said she loved the school when she was a child. According to her, she liked the books, especially their smell. The beginning of the new school year, September 1st was her favourite time, because it made the adults buy the children new clothes, bags and other school items. She thought it was a special time; she felt important and busy running to school in the mornings and doing her homework after the school. Mukaddas, however, stopped going to school when she was 13 years old. It was a collective decision, according to her, made with her other two friends. According to Mukaddas, her parents did not force her: *"my father never said stop going to school but I could see his look every morning I went outside... besides I noticed my mom started spying on who I walked to and from school with..."*¹⁵¹

*Mukaddas's presence at home became particularly important when her brother's wedding approached and the household work increased: "I first skipped several classes, then was absent for the whole week, later a month. This was when I realised I had to quit. I told my two close friends, Nasima and Muslima first... they supported me and said they will stop going too... when we left the school there were only 3 more girls left in our class..."*¹⁵²

According to Mukaddas she did not regret this decision: "No, I knew I have to quit school at some point. How could I run to school like a small girl when the chores are not done? ... It is never done really no matter how hard you try. Now the priorities are different. If I want to grow

¹⁵¹ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

¹⁵² Daughter, case study, Safedorak .

up and be a normal Tajik woman with a husband and children I have to stay at home..."¹⁵³

Girls similar to Mukaddas were common among the girls I met during this study. Although not all the decisions to quit the school were initiated by the young girls themselves, the majority of them welcomed such an initiative. It helped them achieve their goal of becoming an excellent Tajik woman through perfecting domestic chores, demonstrating morality and expecting a marriage proposal. While childhood was remembered specifically due to attending the school, the priorities, as Mukaddas mentioned, changed once the girls reached a certain age. The 'seclusion' therefore, although socially constructed, fits the overall rational decision made by the girls in order to be successful in achieving their final goal. For most young women, as I demonstrated throughout this thesis, the only goal left to achieve in recent years, was to become a mother and a wife. The decision to quit school was therefore within the constructed social expectation, therefore an agency shaped by a specific context.

This section demonstrated the agency the girls could exercise at different levels of their lives, which were described in previous chapters. What seemed a complete subordination or docility was a framework that allowed girls to make decisions without resisting or breaking the family ties and connections. The family worked in a way that protected the girls and gave them a route to negotiate, plan and exercise their actions around their goals. Thus the girls

¹⁵³ Daughter, case study, Safedorak.

were not passive followers of the rules but were rather self-interested, motivated and rational decision-makers to promote their interests without damaging their family's interests and thus without an aim to break the existing set of values and beliefs.

8.2 The girls' negotiation of the arranged marriages

Similar patterns could be observed when it came to the central theme of this thesis, namely marriage and the selection of the grooms. As mentioned several times throughout this thesis, respondents generally identified marriage as the only possible way for the girls to have their future economically and socially secured. In reality, this practice of course varied from case to case and unfortunately, not all of the marriages provided what was expected.

Nevertheless marrying off the girls at an early age was reported as a way to ensure the future protection for the women as other socio-economic opportunities, such as higher education, employment or financial independence are currently limited. Most of the marriage was arranged for both boys and girls, as I also noted earlier. Arranged marriages however should not be confused with forced marriages, as most of the girls could not be simply forced to accept the marriage arranged for them.

Marriage holds a special meaning in the country, as also noted earlier. Marriage is a union each individual in the country is expected to be engaged in at some point of their lives (Roche, 2010, Tett, 1996). As a passage from childhood to adulthood, marriage is a role, both men and women are expected to undertake. For the women and their families in this study, marriage was

inevitable and associated with social status. For these reasons mainly, the families started preparing for their children's marriage early, sometimes when those were still children. Several girls I met had a big trunk where their mothers would collect various items early on as a preparation for their dowry.

Marriage was not rejected by the girls I met both in the urban and rural areas of Tajikistan during this study. It was, in fact, a choice most girls made rationally, without being forced. Similar patterns were reported in similar countries, such as Iran. As Tremayne (2006) demonstrated in the case of Iran, girls although not forced still got married at a very young age. According to her, the reason behind early marriage in Iran was due to the ideals of marriage which remained unchanged, regardless of the education level throughout the three generation she observed (Tremayne, 2006). In this study, I also did not come across a single girl who was against marriage altogether. Marriage as a hallmark of Tajik woman, was anxiously anticipated by girls observed in this study.

The girls seemed to have no doubt, when it came to marriage itself or the marriage age (with the exception of a small percentage of the women that will be discussed in the following section) but the selected groom at times became the centre of disagreement between the bride and her family members. On several occasions the girls already had somebody else in mind or the groom failed to have the desired physical appearance the girl hoped to find in a man (he was either too short, or tall, or not handsome enough).

In cases when the groom did not meet the physical requirements of the girls, the marriage was not submissively accepted. Several girls I spoke to about their experience in arranged marriage with the "wrong" men, associated

the first reaction to the marriage with anger, fear and frustration. Some of them remembered openly panicking, crying and shouting to demonstrate the level of their unhappiness. The family structure and the importance of connection and relationships, however, allowed the girls to use the available resources to negotiate their way out of the marriage with unwanted grooms. To take this argument further and to demonstrate the agency I would like to bring two different case studies.

Fieldwork observation:

Musharaf. The role of the women.

Musharaf, a 16 years old girl, received a marriage proposal to marry her cousin. The family was thrilled. They had just married their 18 years old daughter about 3 months ago and now they had a proposal for the second one. They thought they had been blessed. The bride however did not share their happiness. Although known as a very diligent, respectful, obedient and modest young girl, Musharaf was devastated by the marriage proposal. According to her: *“I guess I expected to get a marriage proposal at some point... I was afraid that I might not even... but this proposal was not what I had in mind.”*¹⁵⁴

She has known her cousin and now the groom since her childhood and she recalled him as very narcissistic and prone to violence. According to Musharaf, she has always been scared of him, as back in the years of their childhood he used to tease and often punch her. It has been however suspected that Musharaf had a specific preference and expected to receive a marriage proposal from a particular person she fancied. Musharaf however preferred not to mention it.

Her parents accepted the proposal. It came from a very close relative who the parents could not reject. Musharaf openly showed her

¹⁵⁴ Daughter, case study, Varzob.

bewilderment to her mother upon learning about the proposal. Her mother, nevertheless, refused to help as it was her sister's son and they had already agreed. Her father from the other side was unaware of what was going on with his daughter, as he saw her only in the evenings after the work and Musharaf was 'too shy' talking to him openly about the marriage. As Musharaf's mother refused to intervene and distract the marriage arrangement with her sister's son, Musharaf decided to use another person with more power in the family, the grandmother. The old grandmother at first seemed to disagree with Musharaf as well, knowing the importance of the marriage arrangement for her at the right time. Musharaf's state, however, concerned the old woman, so she talked to her father when he returned that day. Musharaf's parents still had no choice and could do little now that they agreed. Breaking the arrangement with such a close relative would not be advantageous, as it would damage the relationship between the two families. The next day the grandmother took a trip to visit the aunt herself and talk to her. She told the family the bride is not physically fit for the marriage yet as Musharaf has some medical condition they need to treat before she marries anyone. The dispute thus was resolved.

Mahina. The use of magic

Mahina received a marriage proposal when she was 17. The proposing family was from the same village but moved to live in Dushanbe years ago. Mahina's father Idris and Said, the father of the groom were close friends. One day when Idris travelled to Dushanbe he visited his old friend and came back announcing about the arranged marriage between Mahina and his friend's son Ulugbek. Mahina was not happy about the arrangement however. As the only daughter among five brothers, she could not imagine living far from her family, especially her mother, who was terminally ill and needed assistance with the household chores. Although Mahina had five brothers, they were younger than her

and thus could not yet marry to bring a *kelin* into the house to help their mother.

Luckily, Mahina's mother Latofat also did not want a marriage that would separate her from her only daughter so significantly. She asked her husband to find an appropriate reason and reject the proposal. Idris did not feel comfortable with it – how could he as a man “*give a word then take it back?*” Mahina was devastated, the marriage they all waited for so long, did not bring her happiness. According to her mother: “*She suffered so much! She was pale, lost weight and became so unattractive!*”¹⁵⁵ That was when Latofat decided something must be wrong. “*I realised something bad is happening. The marriage, no matter how much you do not want it cannot have such an effect on the girl. I thought something was done to Mahina, and took her to see a folbin. Turns out, I was right! Somebody put a curse on her and her luck was locked! No matter what she would do, she would fail it. Folbin said Mahina must not marry this person, because their stars do not match. The marriage proposal by itself was a curse!*”¹⁵⁶ Such a strong explanation persuaded Idris to speak to his friend Said. The marriage was thus avoided.

The two cases above are an illustration of the ability to negotiate by both Mahina and Musharaf. Both girls did not just accept the proposed marriage. Although the marriage window, as discussed in Chapter 5 was very narrow and did not allow much flexibility, the girls were not forced to get married, if they did not want it. Without breaking the family relationships and staying within the expected mode of behaviour, both Musharaf and Mahina found creative ways to deal with the unwanted marriage proposal.

¹⁵⁵ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

¹⁵⁶ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

It should be mentioned that not all of the girls were able to deal with the arranged marriages the way the two girls from the case studies above did. I heard of cases when girls were forced to get married against their will. In the village for example, the women told a story of a 15 years old girl who was forced by her stepfather to marry his 39 years old friend as a second wife. Unfortunately, no amount of tears or assistance from older women helped the girl. As a result, after living with the man for a year and being constantly abused, the girl, who was expecting a child, ended her life through setting herself on fire. Not all the negotiations were thus successful depending on the specific situation of the families.

Similar to the cases illustrated above, however, most of the girls were able to negotiate their way out of the marriage through using the age power of other related women, such as mothers, grandmothers or aunts. Although girls were not happy about the arrangement, they still had to stay within the accepted norms and behaviour. As I have been demonstrating, respect was a vital part of the relationships in the Tajik families. To avoid confrontation and thus show 'disrespect' the girls used the older women's support and their influence.

In the first case when even the father was not able to fix what has already been promised, the older woman used her age as an advantage persuading the family about the downside of the proposal. Also her grandmother's creativity to think of a reason strong enough but at the same time not affecting Musharaf's reputation and damage the family's relationship is interesting to note. Although it was not exactly true that Musharaf had an illness she had to recover from, the fact that it came from an old woman could not be doubted. The age was respected and considered 'wise' if the decision was

already made. It was due to age hierarchy that Musharaf was able to benefit from that saved her from the unwanted marriage. Perhaps Musharaf would not decline the marriage proposal if she did not have an alternative. She later received a proposal from the family of the young man she secretly fancied.

The second case, although somewhat similar to the first one, in this case involvement of the mother, is interesting in its own way. A similar case was reported in Afghanistan, where young people were able to manipulate their marriage choice and direction using magic and spiritual beliefs (Shalinsky, 1989). Mahina's mother in this case, realising the lack of other ways to persuade her husband, used the spiritual belief, which was difficult to doubt. It should be noted that usage of such method, spiritual or magic was reported constantly by the women, in many cases, including illness, marriage attraction, fertility problems and so on. Although some scholars might interpret this method as a way of resisting the men's dominance (Abu-Lughod, 1999), I consider it a creative way of exercising agency. It was due to this widespread spiritual belief women were able to negotiate their interest within the existing structure, not causing disputes or destructions.

This section demonstrated how most of the young Tajik girls in this study were not forced into the marriage. Although marriage was arranged for girls, they did not submissively accept the fate they did not agree with. As I attempted to show, the authoritarian and patriarchal family type allowed women to use what was available to negotiate their interests. In the two cases I brought in this section, I demonstrated how the girls used respect towards the older people and the spiritual belief to find a way out of undesired arranged marriage.

8.3 The flexibility and narrowness of agency

In this last section, I turn to the women, who were somewhat different from those that were the focus of the overall thesis. Unlike the rest of the girls, those discussed in this short section did not enter the marriage market when expected but rather chose a different path. They had however lived all their lives under the same ideology, structure and belief as the rest of the people in Tajikistan. The small percentage of Tajik women¹⁵⁷ nevertheless decided to “delay” their marriage and concentrated their efforts on continuing their education, finding jobs and thus improve their own economic situation and support their families. What I am trying to show in this section is how the existing system allowed flexibility in demonstrating agency depending on the availability of other choices. At the same time, the section demonstrates how narrow this agency was. Although the women in this part of the chapter were more ‘independent’, they were still expected to fit the norms dictated by the society in general. In this section, I will first discuss why the decisions were different for these particular women and then talk about their participation in the marriage market.

A small number of girls in Tajikistan, mostly from the urban area, were different from the majority of the Tajik girls that one could meet on the outskirts of Dushanbe and particularly when traveling to the regions. Because of more opportunities in the city and some centres of the regions, these girls were able

¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, no study has been carried out in the country to focus on this particular group of females. For that reason, it is hard to come up with the percentage to demonstrate the difference in number of the females in this section with the rest of the women. However, as such females mostly are in the urban area and few in the centre of some regions, I assume the number of these females in comparison to the more traditional is very limited.

to find employment at various places, particularly international organizations that are known for more attractive benefits, such as a higher salary and health insurance. To find well-paid employment, some of these women did not only have a professional degree from a local university, but even one or sometimes two degrees from international universities. Their families usually supported decisions made by the young girls. Most of the girls came from the so-called elite families or intelligentsia, a small number of families holding good positions in the Tajik society either due to wealth, political power or good education, most of whom were known as Russianized as a result of adopting Russian culture and language¹⁵⁸.

Although they appeared to have more agency than a traditional Tajik family, as far as I could tell from the girls in my sample, the elite or intelligentsia families had the same values as to the rest of the families in Tajikistan. Women in this section therefore, were also under the patriarchy and authority of their brothers, fathers and other men. It was probably due to their financial contribution to the family however, that their decision-making power was more flexible. Thus, although these women possibly came from a different family setting, the traditional expectations still existed where they grew up, which similar to other girls put pressure on these women to stay within a tradition and get married, similar to any other Tajik girl.

None of the girls I describe in this section considered themselves traditional but nor did they see themselves as completely non-traditional. All of them learned the necessary skills classifying them as decent Tajik girls. They

¹⁵⁸ The Russianized families are less common now in the country although they still exist in the urban areas, as they bring up their children the Russianized way and the same goes from one generation to next.

thus were well trained as potential host and were perfectly able to cook and clean similar to other traditional women. At the same time, they knew exactly what behaviour was expected from them, such as respect towards the elderly, modesty and obedience. Similar to other girls, these women joined their families in cooking and took pride in demonstrating good housewives skills during the national holidays. When talking to older people or someone higher in the hierarchy, even during a work-related meeting with a state official, they never failed to put their right hands on the left side of their chest demonstrating respect. They addressed the older people, those higher in hierarchy or even their own parents, by the official '*shumo*'.

At the same time, most of them never wore a traditional Tajik dress, while others wore it only when necessary, for example during weddings or other national celebrations. They could wear any European clothing they felt comfortable wearing. Surprisingly although such issues as European clothing was not considered immodest to them, other practices, such as smoking or drinking were. For example, one of the girls in my sample smoked a cigarette when we talked in her office. She then opened the windows and frantically started waving with a towel to get rid of the smoke. According to her, although she smoked 'a little' it was best nobody found out about it, because 'Tajik girls do not smoke'. Thus although referring to themselves as non-traditional, in reality perhaps unconsciously, many of these women followed a similar traditional pattern, to remain, as I argue in this section, in the marriage market.

These girls chose a path that made them economically independent. The marriage role as economic provision as a result has lost its power over them. The social status, however, associated with marriage and with being a

mother and a wife did not lose its value for the financially independent girls and their families. The girls 'delayed' their marriage until they had better education or employment and not only could support themselves but they could also provide for their families. However, by the time, they accomplished what they worked for, the marriage window was long closed and they fell out of the marriage market. To achieve the socially expected role, therefore, most of them, although modernized tried to be as modest as possible.

These findings echo a similar study in Cote d'Ivoire where women with western education were able to self-realize and modernize as the socio economic context required, but were not realized as Muslim women as they failed to perform the transition that is expected of females (LeBlanc, 2007). The women in Cote d'Ivoire therefore strengthened their religious practice (Imaniya) to find their way back to the marriage market. The Tajik women in this section, thus, practiced some modesty and domestic chores to demonstrate their marriageability as much as possible. I would like to bring a few case studies, which examine the issues associated with the marriage for the economically independent women.

Fieldwork observation:

Aziza

Aziza was 37 years old. She had a Master's degree from an American University and worked for a well-known international organization in Dushanbe. Aziza had a good salary for Tajikistan. She therefore was able to support her family, including her brother and his family, and paid for her sister's education. She still lived at home with her parents and two other siblings. Although very close to her family, she hated celebrations and family gatherings. *"The only thing they discuss is me as soon as I*

*enter! Especially my grandmother. The woman is so old she doesn't remember my name, but she never forgets that I am not married! What am I supposed to do, if all the men are afraid of such an independent woman as me?"*¹⁵⁹

Zubaida

Zubaida was 35 years old. She came from a southern region, so she had to rent a flat in Dushanbe, which she shared with her two cousins, who were students. Similar to Aziza she worked in an international organization and had a decent salary most of which she shared with her family. Zubaida was very angry one day, because of an incident that happened at work. This was Zubaida's story: *"All of the younger women at work are so furious. Turns out the drivers have been talking about us behind our back. They feel sorry for us, apparently because we are not married and we will remain "old maids" forever. One of them even said, "a self-respecting man would not want a wife who spends most of her time in shorts rather than cooking at home."*¹⁶⁰

Muborak

Muborak was 32 years old. Having two Master's degrees from western universities, she had a very good position at one of the organizations. Being 32 and not being able to cope with the family pressure any longer, Muborak agreed to an arranged marriage. Although she had never seen the groom before that was only part of her problem. She found out from other sources that the groom, 25 years old, was boasting around about his marriage. He was heard saying the reason for marrying such an *"old lady"* is similar to *"finding a treasure chest key"* referring to Muborak's

¹⁵⁹ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

¹⁶⁰ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

financial situation. Muborak however, no matter how disappointed, went ahead with the marriage.

The women in these cases and women with similar situations never abandoned the idea of the marriage and the importance of having a family. According to most of them, *'marriage can wait'* until another degree or a better job or after purchasing a flat in the city. While working on improving their financial situation, these women however, found themselves trapped in the social and familial pressure of not being married and thus lacking the important quality that increases women's social status in the country. As one of the respondents of this study said, *'a married frog has a status'*, being married and thus having a family and children classified women as appropriate and tamed while not being married and having to interact with various men decreased their social status and questioned their morality. As Zubaida from the second case study explained to me: *"everybody at work has been asking when I am planning to get married...it is like I don't have other qualities, all they see is me not having a husband!"*¹⁶¹

All three women, in the above case studies are much older than the current marriage market for the girls. Thus only in their late 20s or early 30s the women were aware of their age difference and how with each year the idea of marriage moves further away. According to most of these women, the only reason they were considering marriage at all, or marrying a much younger *'fortune hunter'* as in a case with Muborak, was only due to the family or social

¹⁶¹ Daughter, case study, Dushanbe.

pressure. Indeed, the families of these women although somewhat proud of their daughters' achievements, worried about the lack of marriage proposals. Muborak's mother for example, whom I met once, expressed a great concern about the future of her daughter and the 'inappropriateness' of not being married. Although the girls were financially better off in comparison to the rest of their family and even their brothers, the mothers still feared the possibility of them becoming dependent on their brothers in an older age if not married.

Most of the young 'independent' women, similar to other girls had everything ready in case the marriage proposal came along. The marriage age however got lower, where the girls, as discussed previously, entered the market at the very early age of 15. Such an early age of marriage became an issue for the women discussed in this section. These 'different' women blamed the marriage age for creating such a gap between the two types of women in the country: the larger group of those who chose marriage due to inability or unavailability of other opportunities; and the smaller group of the financially better off, somewhat independent women who chose to delay their marriage. According to the latter, the younger age was preferred over them by the grooms and their families, as at this age the girls had very little personal opinion and although they did not contribute financially to the families, were easier to manage, similar to what was demonstrated in the previous chapters.

To fit the expected norms therefore the women who chose a different lifestyle, returned to the marriage market or never completely left it by following perhaps unconsciously or perhaps rationally some of the expected norms. Although in a way the women had more agency in comparison to the girls in the rest of this thesis, their agency was also quite narrow. While working to become

independent, the girls were not able to abandon the basic rules to be considered as marriageable. When they saw the closed marriage window, at times they were forced to use exactly what they worked for, their financial situation, to make a transition back to the marriage market and to be qualified as a proper Tajik woman, as was the case with Muborak.

This section demonstrated the flexibility and variety of the agency and its practice by the small percentage of women in Tajikistan depending on the availability of other opportunities. The agency however, was narrow in its context. Women in this section chose to delay their marriage in order to become economically independent and support themselves and their families. However, growing up and being under the influence of traditional expectations, in their journey to modernize, these women fell out of the narrow marriage window and thus failed to perform the traditional role of becoming a mother and a wife. Marriage however never lost its social value for them. As a result, I tried to demonstrate, how women negotiated their participation or return to the marriage market.

Conclusion

The young girls in Tajikistan learned the gender appropriate behaviour and morality from an early age; their social life was limited and they focused on perfecting certain skills to attract possible suitors and be ready for the marriage by the age of 15. I described this process up to this point. Using the concept of patriarchal connectivity (Joseph, 1999) or importance of family relationships, I argued, that the above mentioned steps were taken to demonstrate love and

affection and to protect the women from the future insecurity. However, what I have described so far might appear as entirely dominant and authoritarian family type, where girls had no other choice but accept the early marriage chosen for them. The current chapter was therefore to demonstrate the opposite. It argued that the girls were not passive victims of their families but were rather an active decision-makers or advocates for their own interests.

In the dominant family type where women and youth are usually described as oppressed, any form of agency is viewed as resistance. Women are described as resisting to internalize their gendered roles and thus forced to wear gendered masks to achieve their goal (Harris, 2004). I suggested a different approach here. I argue that in a patriarchal connectivity, introduced by Joseph (1993), when family members see themselves as an extension of significant others and actively engage in each other's daily life and where such notions as respect, care and love are demonstrated through appropriate actions, decisions made by individuals remained within the family interests. I argued in this chapter that agency, and thus decision to act for one's interest, is possible exactly due to the family values and as a result does not require resisting or destroying it.

I demonstrated in this chapter how women were able to make rational, self-interested decisions that were although socially and culturally constrained, did not necessarily mean to oppose the existing structure. Starting early in childhood and throughout the different stages described in separate chapters in this thesis, the young girls were not powerless and were therefore able to exist under the seeming patriarchal oppression. At each stage whether it involved learning first gender appropriate behaviour, specific domestic skills or even

domestication, the girls were not passive acceptors of their fate. They participated in these 'lessons' or *tarbiya* because they found them positive for their growth and final goal, whatever it might be at that stage. When it came to the marriage therefore, most girls agreed with the importance of the marriage for their own benefit, whether it was gaining social status or expecting economic support in future. The disagreement over the arranged marriage, if existed, was negotiated by the girls through available sources, such as age and gender hierarchy.

If the women decided to 'delay' their marriage, which was possible due to availability of other opportunities, such as employment, they were still able to do so. With the women in the last section, different from those described in the previous chapters, I tried to show the flexibility of the agency, but that was given the girls had other choices. In this last section, I also demonstrated the narrowness of the agency. Thus although the girls were able to achieve other goals apart from being married, the marriage never lost its value for them. As a result, the women were forced to negotiate their way back to the marriage market, which was missed due to prioritization of other self-realization goals.

This chapter aimed to contribute to the previous chapters by suggesting a different interpretation of the girls' daily life under the dominant family. Through letting their parents, siblings and other individuals, such as *bibikhalifa* to '*tarbiya*' or teach them certain skills, the girls took an active participation in the process. What could seem to be enforced on them therefore, for example, arranged marriage was in fact a goal the girls shared with their family members. The decision to learn and to become a proper Tajik woman, to get married and socially and financially secure their future were some of the decisions, or the

agency that was constructed culturally but also socially under the current context.

Chapter 9

‘Bringing up a girl you bring up a nation’. The influence of state on families’ decisions

“His Excellency¹⁶² mentioned that a special attention should be paid to morality of the girls as they are future mothers... He also gave an order to organize the collective wedding for so many young people...all that at the state expenditure with no financial input from their families. Of course, what else is there to do for young girls? We can hardly find employment for men! The president is doing very right thing encouraging marriages.”¹⁶³

This chapter explores how the current state influences families’ decisions about the age of marriage. The link between state legislations, ideology and the overall socio-economic and political context and families is impossible to ignore in general, but particularly for the purpose of this thesis. As the goal of the thesis is to look at the reasons behind the fall of the marriage age for girls in Tajikistan, this particular family decision, as I argue, is not solely due to the patriarchal framework. Other factors influence the decision about the age of first marriage. I thus demonstrated throughout this thesis how marriage became the only available mean to protect young girls for many families under the difficult socio-economic conditions that currently exist in the country. Along with the socio-economic opportunities, however, families believed marriage, being a wife and a mother was the only role women could undertake in recent years.

Although the last belief was associated with the lack of other opportunities and

¹⁶² The expression is used when referring to the Tajik president

¹⁶³ Civil servant, Varzob.

with a traditional expectation from the women¹⁶⁴, the gendered role was also strengthened by the state rhetoric.

The literature¹⁶⁵, describes the current Tajik state as unable to provide socio-economic welfare for its citizens. The state is also described as severely controlling the practice of religion, but at the same time promoting patriarchal values as part of 're-nationalization' in the post-Soviet years. I also discussed the state-society relationship presented in the literature and the way it influenced families' decisions in Tajikistan and the whole region earlier. Apart from the previously presented literature, Matveeva demonstrated the authoritarianism in the region, where according to her Tajikistan is ruling with 'hard authoritarianism' (2009, p. 1101). She describes the Central Asian states as relying on 'extensive bureaucratic apparatus' where power is centralized and economy and management are regulated by the state presence (2009, p. 1101). Although Tajikistan declared democracy in 1990, Matveeva's view is that '...Central Asian regimes' central claim for legitimacy is not based on democracy or inviolability of a constitutional order, but upon their ability to provide security, growth and welfare' (2009, p. 1101). Another important note to make here, before moving to empirical findings of this study, is the informality of power in Tajikistan. Oliver Roy notes that networks based on kinship and patronage allow Tajik people to avoid interfering with the authoritarian state or to 'compensate for the weakness or corruption of the state' (cited in Nourzhanov and Bleuer, 2013, p. 126). As Nourzhanov et al., (2013) demonstrates, the

¹⁶⁴ See chapter 5 for discussion on current marriage age and importance of marriage.

¹⁶⁵ See chapter 3 above.

informal power in Tajikistan has been based on regional affiliation and kinship networks since the Soviet Union period.

Apart from the above, the modern Tajik state seems to be rather confused with its ideology, particularly with regards to the women's role¹⁶⁶. On the one hand, it attempts to appear a modern country. It promotes education through creating education quotas for girls, so they could continue their education free of charge in higher education. Moreover, it made changes to the Tajik Family code, increasing the marriage age from 17 during the Soviet time to 18 for both boys and girls, and banned other marriage practices, such as polygamous unions. These steps symbolize the state's attempt to create equal rights with men for the Tajik women, where a woman does not have to get married early and can continue her studies to self-realize and become an independent individual. On the other hand, however, the state created barriers for the creation of such an 'ideal', 'modern' Tajik woman. Thus, secondary education became non-compulsory, where families were given a choice to withdraw their children from school at the age of 15, which resulted in widening the gender gap in education. The state also promoted patriarchal values and gendered roles through creating a symbol of a traditional Tajik woman represented through such national symbols, as traditional dress and the ability to be a good hostess. It also promoted motherhood and marriage values by emphasising the role of mothers in bringing up the children and organizing weddings at the state expenditure.

¹⁶⁶ See chapter 3 for current state policies and messages.

As I will show in this chapter, the contradictory messages it sends to the Tajik population, however, did not overly perplex the families. As history shows, Tajik families are used to living under the state with a contradictory ideology. The previous Communist state had the same features. During the Soviet Union period, families, particularly women were targeted by the state as both active contributors to the society through social and economic participation and as traditional mothers responsible for bearing numbers of children and bringing up patriots of the Communist state¹⁶⁷. Families have however found creative ways of dealing with such contradictions back then and in contemporary Tajikistan. The fieldwork indicated that Tajik families have identified another method of coping. Some of these methods are adopted from previous times, such as using informal connections or the unlimited possibility of corruption. Newer methods include flexibility in interpreting the law to fit local practice to avoid violating legislation. In this chapter, therefore I identify how families created their own methods of living under the state with double or confused signals, including in relation to every day decisions, such as the age of marriage for the young Tajik girls.

This chapter will analyse the influence of the state on family decision-making through two types of respondents. (1) Civil servants, such as teachers, doctors and employees of various state institutions who, while educated and employed to implement the legislation on minimum marriage age, were also parents with their own children. (2) Traditional Tajik families met for the case studies in Dushanbe, Varzob and Safedorak.

¹⁶⁷ See chapter 3 above.

9.1 The civil servants

The state institutions, one would expect, exist to ensure the laws and policies of the state are implemented on the ground. Within the current policy framework therefore, these institutions are meant to encourage families to keep their children, particularly daughters, in schools and later enrol in higher education using the existing presidential quotas. Moreover, they are also meant to ensure that girls are at the legal age of 18 when they are getting married and that the marriage is registered. Civil servants are supposed to monitor the implementation of such laws and ensure those families who violate them are penalized in accordance with the law. In reality, however, the civil servants working at such institutions not only failed to oversee the policy implementation, but also even violated the law themselves along with the rest of the local population.

The non-existence of clear legislation and the double messages the state sends created confusion amongst everyone, including the civil servants. Thus, while the law on minimum marriage age exists, there is no clear mechanism for its implementation. Therefore, most of the interviewees¹⁶⁸ from the state institutions although they were aware about the existence of a certain policy were neither motivated nor interested in monitoring their implementation. They complained about the bureaucracy of filling out numbers of documents “nobody needed” and “wasted” time. They also received a low salary¹⁶⁹ and were therefore not willing to undertake more work. Moreover, nobody was even sure

¹⁶⁸ Twenty professionals were interviewed for this study. See chapter 4.

¹⁶⁹ The medium salary according to my respondents was \$60 per month.

whether it was their duty to ensure the law was followed through among the people.

*“The law on minimum marriage age exists...yes... who is working on it though...that I don’t know. It would be difficult to implement it anyways, at least for us...because we are already doing too much! And that is all for the small salary we receive! If I tell you how much I earn, you will laugh at me. I wouldn’t personally want to undertake another responsibility, unless they increased my salary. Of course no one would! If the order comes from the top, we have no choice but to implement it. That is why nothing works, you see... people do their work only because it is an order, and everybody is doing it only for the paperwork, nobody cares about the real work!”*¹⁷⁰

*“I know about the law on minimum marriage age, but I do not want additional workload just like everyone else! Why should we care at what age the girls get married anyways? I would rather worry about my daughter, she is growing up and what else is there for her to do if not to get married. For the salary I receive, I am already doing enough...it is only wasting everyone’s time. Seems like all the other problems we have are solved and now all we need is to check who is getting married and when!”*¹⁷¹

The civil workers did not welcome additional work or responsibility; firstly, because they found it unfair to undertake more work for the minimum salary

¹⁷⁰ Civil servant, Dushanbe.

¹⁷¹ Civil servant, Varzob.

they received, and second because some of them thought such laws as the one on minimum marriage age was unnecessary. Besides, as a result of the confusion, the so-called 'gate keepers' confessed they used the same practices when it came to making a decision regarding their own children, as I demonstrate below.

At the same time, almost all of the civil servants, interviewed for this study believed in the state's attempt to protect the girls from early marriage. They believed the existence of education quotas was to encourage the families to postpone the marriage of their daughters. According to most of them, socio-economic opportunities existed for the girls whose families were willing to explore them. However, the school drop out of the girls upon reaching puberty created contradictions in the civil servants' beliefs. This was particularly clear when interviewing schoolteachers. The girls' non-attendance of the school was a rather normal occurrence for teachers. Both male and female teachers agreed they understood and related to the decisions made by the families and by the girls at this dangerous and important stage of their lives. Some not only supported a decision to withdraw the girls from schools at the age of puberty, but also made such a decision themselves.

"The president is very caring... he created a quota for our daughters to study at any university they want... families just don't use those! ...no my daughter is not going to university either... she is getting married actually. Her mother and I thought about her going to a University and we decided against it. I mean 5 years at the University! By the time she finishes studying she will be over 20! What she will do then? Of course I could find her a job at a place

similar to this... but you know with the salary we receive... it is just not worth it..."¹⁷²

*"The girls do not come to school today when they are 14 years old. It is mostly their parents' decision but I have seen girls who stopped coming to the school themselves. Nobody is interested in the school any longer... My daughter is also staying at home more now... she will be 14 in summer and then perhaps from the next academic year she will not come to school at all! That was mostly her decision, my husband and I only supported her. All her friends are out of the school looking for a husband and of course we don't want her to fall behind!"*¹⁷³

The workers of state institutions, teachers and doctors alike, praised the Tajik president for creating opportunities such as the quotas for girls to continue their study in higher education. Even though they believed families should use those, these educated professionals followed the same path as most of the Tajik families met in this study. Similar to the rest of the families, some believed education was not a way to improve their children's future, as in the first quote. Others, followed the example of other families and withdrew their daughters from school in order not to "rob" them of what might be the only possible future, the marriage.

Another argument used to indicate the state's interest in protecting the girls was the legislation on the minimum marriage age. Some of the civil

¹⁷² Civil servant, Varzob.

¹⁷³ Teacher, Safedorak.

servants, including those working in ZAGS¹⁷⁴ denied the existence of marriages below the legal age, particularly in the city. When I visited the central ZAGS in Dushanbe to I found out that not only the ZAGS workers did not have any information on early marriage in Tajikistan, but they also were sure such marriage did not exist in the country, even in the remote areas.

“...underage marriage existed during the civil war probably. But now, thanks to the new legislation, underage marriages are not practiced in the country any longer... not even in the rural areas...” ¹⁷⁵

“...thanks to the President and his care for the girls, such practice does not exist in Tajikistan. The President is very strict about the law...if he created such a legislation, then the marriages have to stop! He would not tolerate the violation of the law! I work in ZAGS for 6 years now and I have never seen a marriage of a girl below the age of...at least 17”. ¹⁷⁶

The ZAGS employees referred to the legislation on marriage age to rule out any possibility of marriage below the legal age. Not only they were confident about the non-existence of such marriages even in remote areas, but also they were sure that if the legislation existed then it had to make a difference. However, the central ZAGS workers were not clear on how the law would make a difference or who would ensure the law was implemented. Nor did the ZAGS workers believe it was their responsibility to ensure the legislation was carried out on the ground. Moreover, as I found out later, the central ZAGS had very

¹⁷⁴ Registry office with executive power responsible for registering civil status of population, such as death, birth, divorce, adoption and marriage. ZAGS continue in all the post-Soviet territories.

¹⁷⁵ ZAGS worker, Dushanbe.

¹⁷⁶ ZAGS worker, Dushanbe.

little knowledge about what was happening at the regional level. Even though they had offices in the centres of each region, the lack of communication between the central and the regional ZAGS was rather clear. Indeed nor did the central ZAGS workers think that monitoring the work of the regional ZAGS was among their duties either.

“...the local government at the regional level probably... that is who should monitor the implementation of the law...I don’t know how though. We are only ZAGS, we register the marriages when families come to us. We do not check the couple’s passport to see how old they are, it is not our work. Somebody else should do that before the families come for registration. Perhaps a child protection office or something...” ¹⁷⁷

“We have offices everywhere, in the regions. Because people need to register their marriages! The regional office does their work we do ours – it is the same registering marriages, what can be difficult about that... no we don’t visit them or monitor their work, why should we anyways! We are the same agency although central. We call some of the regions sometimes, when we need something or they need some information, for example they needed a copy of the new law and we distributed it...that is all we can do really, phone calls occasionally.” ¹⁷⁸

Such incoherence could be due to the nature of the current state.

Nourzhanov et.al (2013), noted the prevalence of informal political power in the country, based on regionalism and kinship, which is used to avoid dealing with

¹⁷⁷ ZAGS worker, Dushanbe.

¹⁷⁸ ZAGS worker, Dushanbe.

the authoritarian state. This perhaps indicates that the regional ZAGS may have benefited from the lack of monitoring. Indeed all the workers at the regional ZAGS were from the same region, and they lived in quite small areas, where everybody knew each other. The lack of monitoring from the central ZAGS, therefore, meant nobody interfered with their own local 'business'. The same was true in the work of other institutions, such as the court, which I will describe later.

The regional ZAGS, which was located in the centre of Varzob, dealt with registering the marriages from all the villages in this region. In contrast to the central ZAGS, the workers of the regional ZAGS were well aware that the phenomenon of early marriage existed. According to the employers of this office, marriage of girls below the legal age of 18 were common in the region. However, they confessed they had no idea whose responsibility it was to ensure such practices did not occur.

*“Marriage of a girl younger than 18 happens all the time...We can't do anything about it, because such marriages are not registered. Families prefer nikokh rather than registration...but I don't know if anyone is checking the age of the girl when she gets married. It certainly is not our responsibility...or at least we haven't been told yet. We only register marriages here...when my neighbour married off his 15 year old daughter, I couldn't say anything. It is not my job... and I do not want to ruin the relationship with the neighbours. It is a small community, I support them- they support me!”*¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ ZAGS worker, Varzob.

While not clear, whether it was the responsibility of ZAGS workers to ensure girls are not below the legal marriage age, these workers also seemed unwilling to undertake such a responsibility. For them the relationship with their local neighbours was of more importance than checking the girls' marriage age. The civil servants thus prioritized what was important for their wellbeing and their reputation in their community rather than implementing what could have been their responsibilities. However, again with no clear instructions from above very few people knew who, according to the legislation, should implement the law and monitor its abidance. Throughout the whole period of the fieldwork, I heard only about two cases where the families were convicted for underage marriage of their daughters. These were brought, however, by a Child Rights Department created by UNICEF at the local government as the gate keeping system of practices that could potentially harm children. The Child Rights Department was in fact the only agency understanding their responsibility to monitor such cases. These departments however, even though aware of their duties had little opportunity to track such cases, due to being understaffed and with a lack of transportation for travelling to the villages.

Some of the civil workers, similar to those met in the Child Rights Department, who agreed about the early marriages issue in the country believed such practice existed for two reasons. First, almost all of the civil workers associated the early age of marriage for the girls with the financial difficulties of Tajik families. According to some of them, Tajik families did not comply with the legislation due to an inability to take care of the many children that most of the families had. Moreover, most of them could relate to the issues the families went through. Even though educated and employed, most of these

professionals struggled to provide for their own families. Several confessed about their difficulties and the ‘unfair’ small salary they received. Apart from poverty, some professionals, particularly from the urban area, blamed the families for backwardness and praised the state’s attempts to improve the lives of women. Such civil workers supported the state in its control over religion¹⁸⁰ and believed the phenomenon of wearing *satr* [a headscarf] by the young girls was an indication of “*where the country is falling*”. It must be mentioned, the latter belief was mostly shared by the older generation, particularly women, established during the Soviet era. These women welcomed the state pressure on religious freedom and found the discussion around human rights to religious practice unnecessary.

*“Families returned to marrying off their daughters so early, because they struggle to feed all the children they have! We all struggle today... who doesn’t struggle? Only those who accept bribes... otherwise we are all poor. Sometimes I think it is better to go and sell vegetables at the bazar then sit in this office whole day and at the end of the month when you receive your salary, you don’t know what to do with it... you can’t even buy one sack of flour.”*¹⁸¹

“The young girls wear headscarves today! This is not a Tajik thing to do! Tajiks never wore a headscarf even before the Soviet Union! Families take only the worse things from religion...this early marriage is also one of those things they adopted from other cultures. This is some kind of modernization for them. Thanks God we have such a smart president, he knows the religious practice

¹⁸⁰ See chapter 3 for more details about the current state’s policies and law.

¹⁸¹ Civil servant, Varzob.

should be limited and he is doing the right thing. When I read in the newspapers sometimes someone criticizing him for this, as if it is not within human rights, all I want to do is laugh at those people! Go practice your human rights somewhere else; we don't need extremism here!" ¹⁸²

Although most interviewees could understand the families' decisions with regards to choosing an early age of marriage for their daughters, others, probably better off financially, not only did not relate to these practices but even blamed the families for being "uncivilized". The two reasons, poverty and religion, named by the civil workers, showed the difference of opinions, again, depending on what opportunities were available for those and their families. The two quotes above therefore demonstrate this difference. The first interviewee was from the Varzob region, working on a minimum salary and therefore understood the families' decisions. The second interviewee in contrast, although held a similar position and salary to the first interviewee, was nevertheless better off financially. Although it was difficult to ask where the additional financial income came from, the second type of civil workers, seemed to be privileged by their current positions. Thus, while I was in the office interviewing Nigina for the above quote, people were crowding outside her door with their questions and issues. Nigina however took her time, drank her tea and enjoyed her conversation with me making people wait. According to her: *"the longer they wait, the more grateful they become for finally talking to me"*¹⁸³. The gratitude

¹⁸² Civil servant, Dushanbe.

¹⁸³ Civil servant, Dushanbe.

probably was expressed through gifts and money, which although Nigina did not say and I never asked, was easy to assume.

Nevertheless, although judgmental at times towards the practice of traditional poor families, some of the civil workers were under the pressure to make similar decisions when it came to their own children. For example, an employer from one of the Child Rights Departments in the city, believed people choose early marriage for their daughters due to the lack of parental education and backwardness. At the same time however, she agreed that a female role was mostly to be a wife and a mother.

“I married off my own daughter when she was 17... Perhaps it is early but it is not completely out of the legislation either. Besides the president himself emphasised on several occasions the role of the girls as mothers...so I believe it is the role of every Tajik girl to get married. She was at this dangerous age you know, so I was worried that my daughter might play around and ruin her future completely!”¹⁸⁴

Surprisingly, when it came to arranging marriage for their children, education or the social status of the parents did not make a difference. While blaming traditional people for backwardness, such established women as Mukadas, obviously supported the idea of early marriage for her daughter. According to Mukadas, her daughter was married earlier than the legal age, firstly because she was in a “dangerous age” and secondly because of the traditional role of the women, supported by the president himself. It is ironic that a child rights department employee as a ‘gate keeper’ of such practices as early

¹⁸⁴ Civil servant, Dushanbe.

marriage supported the state's decision on everything including its contradictory messages. Thus, Mukadas married off her daughter early, justifying the decision by the law allowing negotiation of the marriage age and supporting her decision by the president's message. It is also noteworthy that Mukadas, as a professional, held the same ideas about the marriage age, such as the 'dangerous age' or 'marriage as the only future' as interviewees from the less educated and poorest families in the village.

The civil servants interviewed for this study whose role was to prevent the practice of early marriage and encourage families to educate their daughters using the quotas, not only did not prevent such practices, but perhaps even encouraged them. Unclear of what exactly the legislation said or who was responsible for implementing it on the ground, the legislation on the minimum marriage age thus remained on paper only. Besides, some were not even clear about whether the president banned or promoted the marriage. Moreover, the civil workers related to the families and their neighbours, who went through the same financial difficulties and cherished the same values, and therefore made similar decisions. As this section demonstrated, a lack of clear instruction and the double messages regarding the marriage of the girls from the state resulted in a lack of appropriate action by the state servants.

9.2 Tajik families

The State's double expectations on the role of Tajik women and the contradictory legislation with regards to marriage age and education (see

chapter 3) created a confusion among the civil servants as described in section 9.1. As a result, the traditional families, living both in urban and rural areas, developed their own methods of dealing with the mixed messages. When the state was not clear about what exactly it wanted to achieve, and the civil servants were not sure whether to implement the legislation or practice early marriage along with the rest of the families, the families seemed to create a method that best suited them¹⁸⁵. Taking into account the existence of the minimum marriage age legislation in the country, which is the age of 18 for both genders, this section will explore the view and practice of the families observed in this study. Before I proceed to the section though, I would like to remind that, while the legislation bans marriage below the age of 18, the majority of the girls in this study got married before this age. From the 19 case studies, 17 girls married before the legal age, 12 of them at the age of 16¹⁸⁶.

Fieldwork observation:

S: "We do not need quotas for education. It would be better if the quotas were for marriage or for weddings! That is what matters!"

M: "There is a quota for a marriage too you know? The president organized the wedding of young people... a lot of them... himself and I have heard he even pays for everything! I saw that on television!"

S: "The president talks a lot about marriage anyway. So, I don't think he minds the girls getting married. I would love a free wedding for my daughter

¹⁸⁵ This is similar to what Roche and Hohmann (2011) demonstrate in regards to Tajik wedding celebrations.

¹⁸⁶ See chapter 5 for marriage age above.

though! I bet you have to be his relative or relative of someone at the government to have such a wedding!”

The conversation above occurred between two women after I asked them about the education quotas. The short dialogue is a good example of both the families' interpretation of the state messages and the families' priorities. First, the conversation once again demonstrates the devaluation of education and the prioritization of marriage over other opportunities. Second, the state's emphasis on marriage through organizing “free” weddings was interpreted as promoting traditional values, such as the importance of marriage. The third aspect that the conversation above demonstrates is again the significance of the informal authority that plays a significant role in the country (Nourzhanov and Bleuer, 2013). Knowing someone at the top is thus to qualify for the “free” wedding organized by the state.

To live under these double standards, where specific rules have a double meaning, the regular Tajik families developed a mechanism of practicing what works best for them. Early marriage is one such practice. To create a secure future for their daughters and provide them with necessary skills the families made decisions that were neither supported nor prevented by the state, such as withdrawing girls from school, preferring religious moral upbringing, prioritizing traditional role's and marriage at an early age. Thus, the current minimum marriage age did not prevent marriage of the girls younger than 18 years.

One of the reasons for the state's failure to stop families from such practice was the failure to inform the population about the law. As a result, very few families were actually aware of the existence of minimum marriage age

legislation. When I spoke to the families about the law, it seemed to puzzle them at first, particularly when marriages already were arranged for girls below the legal age. The news however did not startle them. Some turned it into a joke while others believed there was always a way out with the local government.

“...money can solve anything. We are not rich of course, but the employers at the government are not rich either. They work hard and get a very low salary. They would not say no to any amount...”¹⁸⁷

“Nobody ever mentioned such a legislation... are you sure it still exists? I think the president has better things to do than check my daughter’s age or worry about her getting married...”¹⁸⁸

Corruption was reported as a solution to negotiate a way around any law in Tajikistan, including the law on minimum marriage age. ‘Informal exchange’, or corruption is a practice existing in the country throughout the years, as Nourzhanov and Bleuer (2013, p. 136) demonstrate. Families in this study complained on several occasions about having to pay everywhere to solve their problems, such as registering for a pension or even visiting a doctor. I met a very old man once, who did not receive his pension, only because he did not have money to pay for paperwork to get his monthly pension. Consequently, people did not see another law as a way of limiting or improving their lives but rather as another method of the state to obtain money from poor people. Moreover, as the second quote implies, families were sceptical about the existence of the legislation on marriage age, as they believed the president

¹⁸⁷ Father, case study, Varzob.

¹⁸⁸ Father, case study, Safedorak.

would not be interested in such a matter as the age of the brides. The fact that nobody was ever convicted for marrying off his or her daughter earlier than the legal age proved that the legislation existed only on paper without any real power.

The very small number of families aware of the legislation found it unfair. According to such families 18 was too old for girls to be married and they wished for the revision of the legislation. Their main concern was that by 18, girls were too old for marriage and no family would propose to an “old maid”. Besides, by the age of 18 the risk associated with losing the reputation of a decent marriageable girl (discussed in chapter 7) was harder to avoid, which complicated the marriage arrangement of girls above the legal age even further. Due to the law, girls would be out of the marriage market by the age of 18 and would thus possibly miss their only chance of securing their future. These families could not understand the rationale behind the law. Many of the families were sure the president was not aware of the existence of such a law, because he, on the contrary, promoted marriage actively.

“...why do we need this law? I am sure someone created it to complicate our lives. I wish someone told the president about this...but that is the problem. They hide such facts from him... if the president knew we had to go through so much only to receive an approval for the marriage he would punish those who created it! Why else does he arrange marriages of the young people?”¹⁸⁹

“I don't understand! Our neighbour who works at the hukumat married off his daughter only last month...and she was the same age as my daughter, 17!

¹⁸⁹ Mother, case study, Safedorak.

Why does the law not concern people working at the hukumat and only concern such poor families as mine? ”¹⁹⁰

Families believed the president would support their decision to marry off their daughters at any age. Such a belief was once again strengthened by the “free” weddings I mentioned earlier. Besides, the law did not obviously concern every Tajik family at the same rate and sadly, people were not equal before the law. Thus, while the families who knew about the law had to go through such trouble as getting permission from the court, or bribing certain individuals at the top, the civil servants or those who had ‘connections’ faced no issue when arranging the marriage of their children. This in turn, demonstrated that any law could be violated depending on people’s network and unlimited possibilities of corruption.

According to the minimum marriage age law, families could have their children married one year earlier, at the age of 17, if they could prove they had ‘special circumstances’¹⁹¹. In this case, families had to apply to a court to get permission for marriage. I should note at this point that I had a chance to attend few of such court hearings to get an idea what the ‘special circumstances’ meant. I would therefore like to bring an example of one of such cases.

Fieldwork observation:

Munira, who was turning 17 by the time the wedding was planned, came to the court hearing with her mother. Her mother did most of the talking and Munira was addressed only once by the judge regarding her consent

¹⁹⁰ Mother, case study, Varzob.

¹⁹¹ See chapter 3 for more details about the law on minimum marriage age.

to the marriage. Munira's mother was desperately looking for reasons behind the earlier marriage for her daughter presenting many facts from their lives as "special circumstances". She mentioned the family's economic hardship as the main reason. Later however, when questioned further, the woman got confused and said the actual reason was an illness of Munira's grandfather who wanted to arrange the marriage of his beloved granddaughter before he died. Beside, Munira and her family did not think about providing more documents and thus did not have enough proof to support their case. The judge however, chose to ignore these contradictions and made an excuse for Munira's mother as being 'nervous'. At the end, the family received an official permission to go ahead with the wedding.

The 'special circumstances' I heard in the court hearings were similar: the grandparents' severe illness or the financial hardship of a mother as a single parent. The civil servants who helped me to get permission to attend the court for these cases assured me about the complexity of the court hearings and the difficulty to get permission without a very good reason. I, however, found the court surprisingly relaxed and perhaps too supportive. The judge seemed to be more concerned about administrative details of the process, as he ensured all the documents were submitted and filed. Less attention was paid to such factors as lack of proof demonstrating necessity of the marriage generally or for the brides' consent. Although girls had to give their consent to the marriage, they were not questioned properly or long enough to understand their view on the marriage and whether it was forced or arranged. The judge asked one question 'Do you agree to this marriage?', which was followed by a short 'yes' from the girls. Thus, even though girls were the centre of the discussion and their fate was being decided, apart from that one 'yes', they were ignored for the

rest of the hearing. Moreover, the judge seemed overly supportive of the families and did not seem to want to cause any barriers for the families' arrangements. I later spoke to one of the judges, who agreed he supported the families' decisions, because he, again, could relate to them. Similar to other civil servants, described earlier, Judge Salohiddin, confessed he used the same practice as other families. According to this judge, he had a daughter aged 16, whose marriage was already arranged. In addition, Judge Salohiddin, said he knew most of the families coming to the court, as some were either his neighbours, distant relatives or relatives of relatives. He therefore confessed he only did his job, while not necessarily agreeing with the minimum marriage age law itself.

The families who knew about the minimum marriage age law thus applied to the court to get permission for their daughters' marriage. Each time the family applied to the court, they relied on their connections at the court or had to bribe certain people to get the permission. I was very curious about why these families went through so much trouble, while the majority of the families who did not know about the law were able to get away without the permission. As I found out later, it depended on whether the families wanted to have an official registration or not. Even though registration is compulsory under the Tajik Family code, families in this and previous studies avoided the registration¹⁹². Thus, the families who wanted their daughters to have an official marriage registration at ZAGS, were usually those who hoped their girls would be able to accompany their migrant husbands to Russia. Taking into account

¹⁹² See SADC (2002) report on more information about the civil registration of marriages in Tajikistan.

the troubles they had to go through and the 'ambitious' reason, the number of these families was very small.

Most of the families, however, neither knew about the legislation nor cared about its existence. Registering marriages at the registry offices was of little importance to the families in this study. What was important though, was the religious ceremony *nikokh*, which all of the couples had to have. From the 19 cases in this study, only two families planned to organize a civil registration ceremony for their children. This practice was possibly different in the Soviet years (Tett, 1996), when marriage registration was also compulsory, but presently families did not see the necessity of the registration. According to the families, the registration was yet another way of making money for the civil servants, as to register you needed to pay a small fee. Besides families had little knowledge about the purpose of the registration. Even if they knew it was to guarantee security for their daughters and future grandchildren in case of divorce, for example, families were sceptical about its relevance. The registration did not make a difference the way it used to during the Soviet Union time, according to the study respondents. While before the marriage registration had a power, in recent years it was only a bureaucracy requiring paperwork and payment and providing nothing in return. On the other hand, marriage was considered complete or "*halol*" only with *nikokh*. While *nikokh* had always been part of the marriage process in Tajikistan (Brusina, 2009), it gained more importance in the years after the country gained independence, when religion apart from being an identity for Tajiks during the Soviet time, became a practice (Ro'i and Wainer, 2009).

Performing only the religious ceremony therefore allowed families to marry their daughters at any age after the girls reached puberty, as it did not require any legal documents. There was, however, a verbal order from the president banning *mullohs* [religious leaders] from performing *nikokh* if the couple did not show a civil registration document first. In contrast to the legislation on minimum marriage age, the verbal order was known amongst most of the families. This knowledge did not however stop families in this study from escaping the registration. *Mullohs* did not mind performing *nikokh* irrespective of the registration, as long as girls wore the traditional attire instead of the Russian white gown. The appearance of the bride worried the *mullohs* more than a state order. The clothing of the girls, according to my respondents, complied with *mullohs* belief and they perceived it as part of their duty to ensure morality, which in this case was demonstrated through clothing. Further, *mullahs* in many cases were not in a position to refuse performing *nikokh*. First of all, the communities I visited during the fieldwork were small and *mulloh* either had known the families for a long time or was related to them through one way or another.¹⁹³ The second reason, according to the families, was the income the *mullahs* received from performing *nikokh*.

*“... how can a mullah say no if he is my neighbour! Besides he is not doing it as a favour, I must express our gratitude with some gifts and a payment... he is also a person and has a family to feed...”*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ The village where I worked consisted only of 120 households. People therefore knew each other their whole lives and were related in one way or another.

¹⁹⁴ Mother, case study, Dushanbe.

“Anything can be purchased today. And this is only another person with similar issues as mine. Nobody would come and question him anyway. They never do... if they do, you pay them too!”¹⁹⁵

Such an event as a wedding celebration was a way to demonstrate the nature of the relationship among the people who were connected through either being relatives or living in the same community. *Mullohs* performed *nikokh* in spite of the presidential order to show his support for the families, while the families in turn appreciated his ‘understanding’ with a payment and other gifts. Besides, as the second quote implies, the possibility to negotiate and arrange anything irrespective of the existing law was used constantly, particularly under the difficult economic conditions in the country.

This section demonstrated how the state law on minimum marriage age was implemented and interpreted on the ground amongst families. The law to prevent marriages below the age of 18 did not work as most of the families in this study arranged the marriage of their daughters before they reached the legal age. Families either did not know about the law, or they found ways of dealing with it, or they avoided it by prioritizing a religious ceremony over the law. Such variety and flexibility was possible for several reasons. First, the state created confusion among the people regarding what exactly it promoted; preventing marriage below the legal age or marriage traditional value and importance. Second, the state, although it had created the law, failed to develop a mechanism of informing people about the minimum marriage age and the penalty for violating the new law. Third, while the law existed, no clear

¹⁹⁵ Father, case study, Dushanbe.

instructions were available to ensure its implementation and monitoring its operation. As a result, typical traditional Tajik families found their own way of dealing with the contradictory law, as this section demonstrated.

Conclusion

The state had always affected families' decisions in Central Asia and Tajikistan, as I demonstrated in chapter 3. Through historical analysis, I examined how the changes in the overall socio-economic and political context of Tajikistan effected Tajik families' practices in relation to the women's role in general and marriage practices specifically. I looked at the periods that were distinct in bringing significant changes to the region. As the Soviet Union period was known for its major attempts to reconstruct the overall Central Asian context including family structures, it naturally became the core of the discussion, making the other periods known as the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet eras. In short, chapter 3 revealed the state and society relations and demonstrated the link between the two. As demonstrated, even though the Central Asians are reported as the keepers of their culture no matter how strong the pressure, changes in the families' decisions were visible throughout the three periods, depending on the availability of socio-economic opportunities for the women¹⁹⁶.

In the last years, the Tajik state once again identified women as agents to represent its ideology. In a personal observation shared in chapter 3, I

¹⁹⁶See chapter 3 for more details.

demonstrated how women in contemporary Tajikistan are targeted in many ways in the state's attempt to create a vision of a true Tajik woman. This time however, the state appears to be rather confused about what it would like women to represent. The Tajik state wants to create a vision of a modern state with equal rights for both men and women. At the same time however, it suppresses too much freedom and emphasises the traditional role of women.

The double messages and confusion created by the state had its effect on families' decisions. First of all the civil servants who worked at the state institutions to prevent such practices as early marriage, as a result of the contradictory messages, not only did not prevent early marriage but even practiced them. Unsure of whether it was their duty to ensure the implementation of the law on the ground, the civil servants preferred to follow the same path as other families. For them, it was more important to keep good relationships with their neighbours than perform tasks that might not even be their responsibility or do not bring additional income. Moreover, some were confused about whether the president himself encouraged early marriages or banned them. The confusion left the typical traditional families to create their own method of complying with the state that not only did not follow its policy but even contradicted and allowed violation of the law on the minimum marriage age. Thus, although the legislation on minimum marriage age states that marriage among boys and girls below the age of 18 is banned in the country, the majority of the families in this study arranged their daughters' marriage before this age. While families were not clear about what exactly was currently illegal in the country, they knew well that any practice, even if outside of the law, was possible, through various creative means

Chapter 10

Conclusion

This study had two main goals. First, it analysed the phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan, which has not been done previously. Second, the goal of this study was to identify the driving force behind the families' decision with regard to early age of marriage for girls in Tajikistan. As part of the second goal, the study argued that families in contemporary Tajikistan choose an early age of marriage for their daughters to ensure their future well-being under the socio-economic and political context that provides very limited opportunities for girls. In discussing the question of early female marriage in Tajikistan, this study not only addressed the phenomenon but it also offered a different approach to analysing the family's relationship.

Families in Tajikistan have been previously described as patriarchal and therefore based on the dominance of the adults and submission of the children (Harris, 2004, Poliakov, 1992). Roche (2010) on the other hand, describes the families as sacred, where the sacredness is associated with religiosity of being a Muslim. While Roche's interpretation seems to be relevant, the Tajik families I met during the fieldwork attached less religious meaning to the family. Relationships among family members were based on mutual responsibilities, respect, and love and affection (*mehru muhabbat*). The notion of *mehru muhabbat* and its existence in the context of Tajikistan has been noted previously by Stephen (2009). However, as the greater focus has been on the dominant structure of the Tajik families, women consequently are described as

having the lowest status in the family (Harris, 2004, Poliakov, 1992). Girls are reported to be a burden (Poliakov, 1992) that do not have a value as daughters/sisters at their own families (Bastug and Hortacsu, 2000). All individuals, but particularly women, have to wear the gendered mask to resist the expected gendered norms and therefore appear in the literature as somewhat manipulative and insincere (Harris, 2004).

This study has found that dominance exists in Tajik families. Children obeyed their parents and other family or non-family members who were older in age or higher in status. I, however, argue that even under such dominance, *mehru muhabbat* [love and affection] mentioned by Stephan (2009) is possible towards women. From what I observed, therefore, certain family decisions, particularly in regards to the age of marriage, were one of the strategies to demonstrate love and care. I suggested therefore looking at the family relationship through Suad Joseph's (1999) concept of patriarchal connectivity. According to patriarchal connectivity, families that live under the dominance and authority value connections that linked them to significant others. In such families Joseph writes, "notions of self do not conform to the individualist, separative, bounded, autonomous construct subscribed to in many of the Western psychodynamic theory" (p.2). The self here, is developed through lifelong intimate relationships and the close identification of self and other gains more value as the person matures.

Using qualitative data collection and a triangulation method, the main findings of the study are the following:

1. Early marriage of girls exists in Tajikistan, where girls get married before the (legal) age of 18.
2. Families' decisions regarding the age of marriage for their daughters were influenced by socio-economic context and state rhetoric.
3. Family relationships were more complicated than just dominant-subordinate power relation and were based on respect, love and attention that assisted in shaping the girls as proper Tajik women.
4. Girls, although previously described as either completely submissive or playing different roles through wearing a gendered mask, were not powerless. Young women were able to make their own decisions when it came to the marriage and thus exercised an agency accommodated by the structure.

10.1 Summary of major findings

This study does not seek to make claims about early marriage for the whole of Tajikistan. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Tajikistan has four regions that are distinct from one another not only geographically, socially, economically but also through every day practices. Therefore claiming that the findings in this thesis are applicable to the whole country would be overstating the modest purpose of the study. Nevertheless, this research indicated some significant findings that are potentially generalizable to the whole country, most importantly the theorising of family dynamics as based on respect and mutual support and the lack of socio-economic opportunities for women.

This study contributes to the current literature on early/child marriage and to the debate of family and gender relationship in Tajikistan and possibly more broadly in Central Asia region. First, it builds on the existing literature on the causes of early marriage in developing countries and suggests looking into the family processes where the decision on early marriage is made. It deepens the scholarly discussion of early/child marriage by analysing the perception and attitude of the families and girls. Although the current literature looks into the phenomenon from various angles, it seems to miss what I believe is the most important aspect that is the families' interrelations. This study therefore looks behind the main causes previously identified in the literature to try to understand how families and girls felt about such decisions and what made them seek an early marriage apart from the socio-economic and political context. It tries to identify what early marriage represents for the families that in addition to the dominance and subordination, described in the literature, could be based on protection and care for girls.

Second, this study attempts to introduce a new approach to analysing Tajik families and gender relation in Tajikistan. First, even though the sample of this study is limited, it shows that the early marriage among girls is practiced in Tajikistan. It then demonstrates the main reasons identified by the families as the driving force behind the marriage. It argues that such decisions that are mostly associated with the low status of Tajik women in the existing literature, could be based on other causes. The study also explores family interrelations, where it shows that not only men and women follow the dominance and authority rules, but they also assist each other in growing into fully developed Tajik individuals. This study is the first to demonstrate siblings' relationships

from this perspective¹⁹⁷. Lastly, the study attempts to portray girls as not being completely powerless. Although the notion of female subordination and resistance has been discussed previously by Harris (2004) in contrast to her, I believe women do not need to resist the structure. The study therefore attempts to introduce the notion of agency embedded in the patriarchal structure that allows women to make rational decisions that, although socially and culturally constructed, still represent the interest of the girls.

The sections below will now discuss the major findings and contribution of the current study in more detail.

10.1.1 Early marriage exists in Tajikistan

This is the first study to address the phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan. It is therefore the first to confirm the existence of the practice in the country. The 19 case studies identified for observation and interview were selected based on one major characteristic: the families received a marriage proposal and were preparing for the upcoming wedding. From the 19 cases, 17 girls were below the age of 18, while 12 girls in the case studies were getting married at the age of 16. The young women entered the marriage market when they reached puberty at the age of 15. While before this age, the girls are considered small or *dukhtarcha*, at the age of 15 they grow into *dukhtar*, a young woman. *Dukhtar* is usually used in relation to a teenager but it also

¹⁹⁷ Roche, 2010, also describes the relationship among brothers and brothers and sisters. She however does not look into how the selves are shaped under the intimate relationship of the siblings and rather demonstrates the interdependency.

literally means a virgin, as at this age the girls are expected to be virgin until they get married and turn into a *zanak*, a woman. Although I have met girls who were 19 years old and still had not received a marriage proposal, or were getting married significantly later in their early 20s, most of the families and the girls expected and approved the marriage proposal before the age of 18. In fact, families and particularly girls receiving the marriage proposal later expressed anxiety and felt enormous pressure to get married within the existing period.

It should be noted however, that the preference for younger brides came from the grooms' families. As demonstrated in chapter seven, brides were in most of the cases selected by the groom's mother. The mother-in-law therefore preferred the younger girls, who were expected to be easier to manage and train in accordance to the mother-in-law preferences. The age of marriage for the girls lowered in last years particularly due to high migration level among the young men, who travel to Russia in search of employment. The *kelin*, however, was to not only live with her husband and look after him and their children but she had to take care of the rest of her new family members, perform certain tasks and domestic work and thus assist her mother-in-law. The women interviewed for this study also rushed the marriage of their sons also to get a domestic "assistant".

Marriage has always been important for the Tajik families, as noted by previous scholars (Roche, 2010, Tett, 1996) and discussed in chapter five. The marriage age, however, according to the findings of this study, has lowered in the last years for the reasons stated below. Nevertheless, as marriage has always been prioritized and therefore embedded into the cultural expectation of women, the reduction in the age of marriage was perceived as a normal

occurrence for the respondents in this research. As the main role of girls was to become mothers and wives one day, the early age of marriage did not need justification. A woman was to get married at one point or another, whether it was a year earlier or later did not matter. What mattered, however, was to have the girls ready to undertake their future roles and attract the best possible suitors. To demonstrate the importance of marriage, I analysed another type of women, known as less traditional in chapter eight. These women, who were able to become financially 'independent' due to high education and well-paid employment, also never abandoned the idea of marriage altogether. As a result, similar to other more traditional girls, they learned all the important skills, such as mastering the art of good housekeeping and behaving in culturally appropriate manner, as much as it was possible. Similar to other girls, they even though postponed their marriage, experienced anxiety when it came to the marriage expectation. Marriage importance and embedment therefore might become a challenge when trying to change the family practice of choosing early marriage for girls.

10.1.2 Marriage as a protection under current context

The second contribution of this study to the current literature on both the early marriage and family and gender relations in Tajikistan is the analysis of the main causes behind families' decisions to arrange their daughters' marriage at an early age. While the factors for early or child marriage have been discussed extensively, as mentioned earlier, the literature does not look into the families when analysing the causes. This study therefore attempts to both

contribute to the current discussion on family and gender relationships in Tajikistan and enrich the understanding of early/child marriage through exploring the families' perspectives.

In this study, the families identified two main reasons for prioritizing marriage over other important affairs, such as school: (a) increasing social status of women and (b) providing future security.

According to many families and girls met during the fieldwork, a married woman is more respected. Many families agreed that a married woman had the status of someone who succeeded in her life and had a male protection over her. If a girl was of a certain age and still not married, she received all the wrong 'looks' and attention. The majority of the young girls in this study associated late marriage with offensive comments and looks. Most of the girls expected respect and dignity with the upcoming marriage. A married woman was also an individual who did not fail her family and herself and remained sexually pure until the marriage. If the community respected her husband and his family, the attitude towards woman, as a new member of the family also was expected to change. From being only a young girl, she was now known as '*kelin*', the idiom used when referring to any married woman.

Apart from social status, which according to the respondents of this study always existed, marriage gained a new importance in the independent Tajikistan. Girls and their families worked hard to attract a potential marriage proposal, possibly from an 'an ideal' family. Girls left school and stayed at home, mastering the art of domestic work. They prioritized learning the skills of domestic work over acquiring literacy and other formal knowledge provided at

the schools. Formal education had lost its value for the families I met (also mentioned by Whitsel, 2011). According to many respondents of this study, formal education did not provide the knowledge it used to during the Soviet times. It was particularly true in the case of the young women, as those were expected to learn more when staying at home rather than spending time at the schools. Interestingly, such traditional view was shared by the teachers and promoted by the school.

I mentioned in chapter eight several girls that had other skills, which they used to earn money and financially assist their families. These women worked at beauty salons or made traditional dresses and embroidery. The money however was so small it not only did not ensure their own financial independence but also was perceived as a barrier to a marriage in some cases. The young women often had to quit their jobs when receiving a marriage proposal or upon marriage. They were seen as future 'dependents' on their husbands' financial support. Interestingly, some of the families where these brides came from saw marriage and financial dependency on their husbands as normal and as the only way to ensure girls did not depend on anybody else. As in 'ideal marriage', discussed in chapter five, women upon marriage were expected to be provided by the place to live and be financially and materially provided for. Some of the parents therefore, particularly those older in age, worried about their unmarried daughters and feared the possibility of girls becoming dependent on their brothers upon the death of the parents. Dependency on a husband consequently, even if the husband was unemployed himself, was a better option than depending on other family members. Of course, in some cases the husband was far from the 'ideal type'. Although this

study did not focus on the already married women, I met some of these women, whose husband not only failed to provide any financial support but also even physically and verbally abused them.

In chapter eight, I also introduced a few cases of women who were able to become financially independent through western education and employment at well-paid international organizations or NGOs. In the case of these women, not only were they able to provide for themselves and their immediate families, but they also supported other relatives as well. Nevertheless, the financial security did not increase their status socially and in some cases even decreased it in some ways. The women did not realise themselves as Tajik women, according to their families and friends. Sometimes they would be objects of ridicule by their male co-workers for their failure to get married. As a result, to be a 'real' Tajik woman, one had to be married first and only then could they afford to 'assist' their husbands financially. Such women were, however, rare and were based mostly in the urban area. In addition, no research has focused on the financially independent women either in Tajikistan or in other Central Asian countries. Therefore, the limited findings provided in this thesis is the only information on such girls.

Apart from the social and economic context, families' decisions were also influenced by the current state. This study revealed that the state rhetoric and double messages influenced the decisions of the families with regard to the age of their daughters' marriage. As I described in chapter three, through historical analysis, the state influence has always been present throughout various periods on the decisions families made. I also analysed the present state

legislation and its rhetoric on the status of women in general and marriage in particular in chapter three.

As further analysed in chapter nine, the current state sends contradictory messages to Tajik families, which made the families to create their own strategies and methods to deal with practices the state attempted to stop but at the same time promoted. Thus with the issue of marriage age, the law was introduced according to which the minimum age is 18 for both genders. At the same time, however, the state created a vision of a country promoting equality and gender balance. Thus, such steps as education quotas for girls, ratification of certain internationally recognized treaties such as CRC or CEDAW and creating committees such as Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the president could be viewed as the state's attempts to improve the socio-economic situation of women in Tajikistan. However, on the other hand, certain rhetoric prevented the socio-economic advancement of women. Thus, secondary school became non-compulsory, resulting in the withdrawal of many girls from schools. At the same time, the state promoted traditional values, such as motherhood and marriage. These contradictory messages created confusion among civil servants and Tajik families resulting in a high level of early marriage among girls in the country.

The marriage legislation is a point I would like to focus on more. Although the legislation exists, the mechanism for its implementation was never created. I did not meet a committee or a state official who clearly knew who was responsible for ensuring the legislation worked on the ground. The only state institution organized by UNICEF, the Child Rights Committee, which exists under each local government agreed that protecting girls from early marriage

was their responsibility. They, however, were not able to track such cases due to being understaffed and due to the lack of financial support or transportation to travel to the regions. As a result, very few families were aware of the existence of the law on minimum marriage age. Moreover, those who knew, mostly state officials themselves, confirmed they married off their own daughters earlier than 18 or even 17 if a good marriage proposal was received. At the same time both regular Tajik families met during the fieldwork and state officials were positive that the president supported such marriage. The “free weddings” organized by certain governmental bodies under the order of the president indicated the state’s interest in marriage and were often brought as an example of the president’s encouragement of an early marriage.

Thus, as this study revealed, the families’ decisions with regard to the age of marriage for their daughters was based on the lack of socio-economic opportunities and current state influence. For the families, marriage of their daughters was important for several reasons: (a) marriage was often the only way to ensure girls had a place to live and were financially supported in the future by their husbands; (b) marriage was a way of ensuring the women had their own families and were therefore not dependant on anyone else, especially after their parents death; (c) marriage was also to increase women’s social status; (d) and it was encouraged by the state.

Protection appeared to be the main reason for the marriages according to the findings of this study. It should, however, be noted that protection does not justify the practice of early marriage anywhere including Tajikistan. Some of the consequences of such marriage were discussed in the introduction chapter of the thesis and their severity therefore should not be understated.

10.1.3 Re-conceptualizing families' relationships

As mentioned earlier, this study's next contribution is to demonstrate that family relationships, particularly the attitude towards girls is not only based on dominant-subordinate positions. Although I agree that the structure is dominant, this study demonstrated that relationships between the significant others in the family were based on respect, responsibilities towards each other, love and affection. Drawing on Suad Joseph's work on patriarchal connectivity (1994, 1999) the study attempted to demonstrate how family members, men and women alike assisted in shaping each other's identities to be ready as 'real' members of the society where they live. Thus through various interactions among brothers and sisters, this study described in chapters six, seven and eight how the complicated relationships and the role of dominant and subordinate worked for the people living under this family type. Throughout the chapters I described the strategies used by the families to bring up a potential Tajik woman, who was perceived by her community as a 'desirable' *kelin* and who as a result received a deserved marriage proposal.

Consequently brothers, for example Nasim in chapter six, chose a strategy to influence his sisters' behaviour and through that shaped their identity as Tajik girls ready for their future role as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law. In the case of Nasim, he chose to be a strict patriarch, keeping his sisters under constant fear of being punished. His sisters in return believed this was the way a 'real man' behaved. Nasim not only taught his sisters how to behave morally among men but also demonstrated the dominant figure that deserved respect and thus shaped their expectations. The character of Nasim is similar to what

Joseph (1994) describes in the case of brother-sister relationship in Lebanon. This study however extends Joseph's work, because it also demonstrated the significance of other important relationships, such as sisters. Similar to brothers, sisters used various strategies such as punishment, orders and even spying, to ensure those younger in age learned what was appropriate.

Parents in the case studies demonstrated in this research, were also active participants in shaping the gendered identity of both boys and girls. Although I focus mostly on siblings interactions, the influence of parents was also visible. Thus for example in chapter seven, I demonstrated the relationship between daughters and mothers. These two individuals spent a lot of time together – mothers were responsible for teaching their daughters all the skills they knew themselves, the skills the girls would need in their future husband's house. They constantly controlled their daughters learning, comparing them with other girls and taking pride for bringing up the '*qobil*' that was widely 'desired'.

I talked less about fathers' roles in this thesis and did not specifically focus on their role in bringing up the girls. This was mainly due to the importance of mothers' engagement in the girls' upbringing. Fathers were silent observers in many cases, who were involved only under special circumstances. Girls were brought up, trained and even punished through locking in the basement, as in the case of Nargis in chapter eight, without their fathers' involvement. The fathers, however, had the last word in the majority of the cases and were engaged when their attention was crucial. An example of fathers' involvement was demonstrated through Sitara's case in chapter seven.

10.1.4 Women's ability to make decisions

When analysing the phenomenon of early marriage during the fieldwork, I came across a behaviour previously not mentioned in the context of Tajikistan, which is another contribution I am hoping to make into the current debate on gender relations in the country. Although most of the marriages were arranged and negotiated by the family members, girls were not passive in determining their future marriage partners and thus were actively engaged in ensuring their future well-being. Girls, however, did so not through showing resilience or openly resisting their parents' decisions. On the contrary, the agency to make certain decisions was accommodated within this family type. Consequently, to ensure their interests were taken into account when making the final decision regarding the marriage partner, girls used the already existing net of connections, such as age and gender dominance to negotiate their way through.

Moreover knowing how the system works, girls starting from an early age, identified the ways to get protection and security promised to them by the family. As a result, such tactics as demonstrating docility and submissiveness towards their brothers or the older generation did not mean they agreed with everything. Nevertheless, by showing respect and obeying their brothers for example, girls expected certain privileges, similar to women in other related cultures (Baxter, 2007).

This study was not aimed at representing the whole Tajikistan, due to the differences of the region and a limited study sample. Nevertheless, the study is the first research to analyse the phenomenon of early marriage for the girls in the context of Tajikistan. The findings therefore contribute to the existing literature in four main ways. First, the study demonstrated that early marriage of girls existed among the families identified for the case study. Second, the research identified the causes of the apparent fall in the age of marriage. The families of the brides agreed that as the proposal for the marriage came from the grooms' families, they accepted the marriage proposal no matter at what age they daughters received it. Further, such a rush into the marriage was explained as an alternative to the lack of other opportunities for women in the country. Education was devalued, employment was unavailable and the future seemed bleak for the young women. Therefore, marriage, apart from social significance gained economic power, as the families of girls hoped to secure the future of their daughters through such an arrangement as marriage. In addition, the state's policies seemed mixed and unclear, which made families create their own ways of practicing what 'seemed to be allowed'.

I tried to bring a new approach to analysing Tajik families. I argued that although dominant, families' practices were not always to diminish the status of girls, but to rather care and protect them. Third, I attempted to demonstrate that families were not only based on dominance and subordination. The relationship was more complex than that. Family members participated in shaping each other's individuality to prepare those younger to become fully able Tajik men and women, who were ready to undertake the future roles as mothers, wives and established patriachs. Although I met girls who were forced into the

marriage, the majority of the girls in this study were able to negotiate their future using the existing tools within the structure, such as age and gender hierarchy, which is the fourth contribution to the current discussion.

10.2 Looking to the future

Early marriage, which is usually referred to as child marriage in the literature, can have severe consequences first of all for girls, and second for the country¹⁹⁸. Nevertheless, this study revealed that the phenomenon of early marriage was common among Tajik families, at least in the part of Tajikistan where this research was conducted. Driven by the 'ideal marriage', parents and girls worked hard to attract the best suitors who would provide them with future security, such as a house and a financial support. However, how the girls would be treated in their new houses or would their husband provide what he is expected was difficult to predict. At the same time, if the marriage was not a successful one and if the girls struggled from physical, verbal and financial abuse, parents could not do anything. Marriage remained as a way of future security regardless of what that future might hold. Each time parents relying on 'destiny' and hoping 'god will be merciful' towards yet another daughter agreed to a marriage at an early age. Consequently, the notion of destiny replaced the notion of confidence. Thus, although the intentions of the families to have their daughters married might be benign, the consequences were potentially severe. This lack of control over the consequences and over relying on 'god's will'

¹⁹⁸ See chapter 1 for the discussion of the term child marriages and the consequences of such marriages.

demonstrates the desperation of the families and young girls today in the country.

Given the negative consequences and the inability of the families to control their daughters future it is important that the issue of early marriage is addressed appropriately. It should however be recognized that the phenomenon of early marriage among girls in Tajikistan would be a challenging task to address. As early marriage according to the findings of this study occurred as a result of the socio-economic and political context, preventing girls from getting married before the age of 18, requires bigger changes in the overall situation of the country that might take years or even decades.

Nevertheless, the vulnerable position of the families over risking the future of their daughters and severe consequences the girls might face require certain actions. While it might not be possible to provide the Tajik girls with jobs, or change the cultural mentality of people regarding gendered norms and give the girls an opportunity to become independent, live separately from their families and control their own sexuality, other methods could be established. It is therefore necessary for the Tajik state, NGOs and international organizations to provide security for Tajik women, particularly those who marry at an early age instead of fighting against the phenomenon. The recommendations below are not comprehensive and are intended to stimulate further discussion.

10.2.1 Changes in the legal system

A key issue, identified by this study, was a lack of clarity in policies and law developed by the state. Although a law on minimum marriage age exists in the country¹⁹⁹, it is important to reconsider the law and pair it with other changes in the legal system.

First, the state should review its messages and other policies. Thus, even though marriage is recognized by the state for its significance, the attention and the message the state sends to people should be rather focused on education and other roles of women in society, apart from being mother and wife. The state needs to understand the confusion it created among the people with regard to what is important and what needs to be prioritized. Thus, while the state attempts to assist families with big expenditure during the weddings could be appreciated, it is important that the marriage should be viewed as a continuation of the women's role rather than their only existing one.

Tajikistan however is a patriarchal country and the role of women will perhaps always be associated with domestic rather than public arena. This is at least what the history indicates. If we look at the Soviet time, for example, although women were encouraged to participate in public and social life, their association with the 'inner' space was kept throughout the Soviet period. Nevertheless, women were economically more independent and were able to take care of themselves and their children in case of divorce, abandonment or widowhood. To attain at least what the Soviet period achieved, namely bring out

¹⁹⁹ See chapters 3 and 9 above

women into public and social life, Tajikistan needs major changes at all levels, including public perceptions, government structure, and social and economic areas. It should be recognized that such changes are not easily attained.

Second, to reduce the practice of early marriage among girls might not be possible in Tajikistan as mentioned earlier. To abolish this practice the country needs fundamental changes in socio-economic, cultural, traditional and religious beliefs. However, while it is difficult to implement these changes, the current legal age puts the girls in a complicated situation. Women marrying before the legal age are thus not legally protected. Should the marriage go wrong, women and their children are thrown out of their husbands' houses without any financial support. As their marriage is not registered, they have little power to demand any security for themselves or their children. The state, therefore, instead of creating a vision of a country with gender equality, must recognize its problems and make changes that suit the lifestyle of Tajik people under current circumstances. The legal age of marriage therefore should be in line with the reality. While abolishing it completely might not give a positive message, allowing certain flexibilities seems to be necessary. The state needs to look into protecting the women who marry earlier instead of criminalizing them.

Specific protective measures should be developed to accommodate the needs of the women, whose marriage, no matter how early, does not work out either through divorce, abandonment or physical abuse. The first step that is necessary in such cases is to provide the women with a free legal advice to

explain their rights and entitlements. This study revealed that the majority of Tajik people had very little knowledge about most of the legislations, as those were not actively shared with the public. Encouraging women to seek legal advice therefore could be a major way forward. The legislations protecting women however needs to be developed and improved. Women should be provided with such important rights as claiming financial support from their husbands in case of divorce. For example, in cases when there are children involved, alimony has to be part of the entitlement regardless of whether the marriage was registered or not. Moreover, because housing is such a significant problem in the country, providing the women and their children with a place to live is needs to be prioritized. As most of the women marrying early drop off school, providing training to teach certain skills they could use to make a living, is an additional way of supporting such women. In general, providing a safety net for women that marry at an early age and whose marriage does not work out, is more effective and realistic approach rather than trying to prevent the early marriage itself.

In addition to the changes to the legal marriage age, other laws should be reconsidered and restructured. Thus, the law on non-compulsory secondary education should be repealed and secondary education needs to be made compulsory again. When the school is mandatory up to the age of 17, it already should either automatically decrease the number of girls getting married before this age or have the married girls still attend the school. The association between school and age of marriage has been noted widely in the literature (Bates et al., 2007, Garenne, 2004, Guday, 2005, Jensen and Thornton, 2003, LeBlanc, 2007, Li and Wojtkiewicz, 1994, Malhotra and Mather, 1997, Mathur et

al., 2003, Shehada, 2008, Tremayne, 2006, UNICEF, 2001). Although the formal education was devalued in the country due to its quality and lack of employment opportunities, according to the findings of this study, the longer girls could stay at school, the more mature they would be both physically and psychologically. Thus even though they might not continue their education further or find employment, at least by the age of 17, girls' expectations towards marriage might change. Those however, who choose to be married before this age, would have to still attend the school. The compulsory education would in this case increase the literacy among women and leave other 'doors' open in case the marriage goes wrong.

Lack of socio-economic opportunities however was identified by the families in this study as one of the main reasons for early marriage. While recommending the creation of employment opportunities for women in a country that struggles economically could be ambitious, other methods might be explored. For example creating opportunities for self-employment or private business, such as being engaged in trading or opening beauty salons or small working places for sewing traditional dresses and embroidery. Such activities are currently popular among women, as I observed during the fieldwork. The small payment, however, difficulty in getting permissions for starting the business and endless bureaucracy and corruption, discouraged most of women from looking into such opportunities. The state therefore should ease the process and encourage women to look for financial security not only through marriage but through exploring other opportunities as well. This initiative could be part of the secondary education curriculum, where life skills, as developing business plans or starting one's own business, or even sewing and embroidery

could be taught. Moreover, taking into account what has been said earlier, engaging women into these jobs could be a step in the right direction, because these professions are still associated with women and therefore might be supported by families that are more traditional.

10.2.2 International organizations and NGO involvement

The role of NGOs, civil societies and international organizations is important in providing social protection for women married at an early age in Tajikistan. The Tajik state depends on the support of international donors and organizations for many existing problems. Therefore, its ability to deal with the issues the girls face as a result of early marriage without the support of other organizations is doubtful.

The role of international organizations is particularly important to understand and encourage. NGOs, for example, function in almost every corner of Tajikistan and therefore are a good mechanism for reaching out to the wider population. For these NGOs, however, although financially independent from the government, most of their activities would not be possible without the financial support of international organizations. Their programs and activities are, as a result, based around the expectations of the bigger organizations. It is thus important for the phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan to be recognized as an issue that needs the attention of the donor organizations. While the phenomenon was discussed briefly by the organizations in various reports (Tajikistan, 2005, UNFPA, 2012, UNICEF, 2003), no program currently exists that deals with the issue separately.

This lack of attention from such organizations as UNICEF, UNIFEM and other similar organizations could be also linked with the lack of government's initiative. The international organizations, as the main financial institutions are in a position to influence the recognition of the problem and promote activities of the state and NGOs. Many programs, departments or projects that exist in the country, were initiated by international community and later on passed to the state for further development. The fact that international organizations have not targeted female adolescents within the early marriage context, might therefore be associated with the lack of the state's interest and actions directed towards the phenomenon. Programs, such as increasing awareness regarding the negative consequences of early girls' marriage and promoting education through developing girls targeted curriculum to teach the young girls life skills that could enable them to get some financial income regardless if married or not, are a few examples.

10.2.3 Community involvement

The practice of early girls' marriage was supported by the community members, both men and women alike, as the findings of this study suggests. Moreover, the practice was encouraged by the school and other community leaders. Influenced by the state rhetoric on women's traditional role, school principals and teachers not only discouraged the girls from attending school but also were a role model in withdrawing their own daughters from school. Similarly, as demonstrated in chapter nine, although religious leaders, *mullohs* are banned by the state to perform religious ceremony *nikokh* without proof of a

civil marriage registration, families were still able to avoid registration and marry off their daughters at any age they preferred. *Mullohs* performed *nikokh* regardless of whether the marrying couple had a registration or not as they benefited from it financially.

Teachers and religious leaders, however, have a certain influence on people's beliefs and practices. Although, not identified as a sample for this study, the opinion of religious leaders and schoolteachers mattered to men, women, young and old. Teachers were viewed as the most educated people in the community, while religious leaders, such as *mulloh* and *bibikhalifa* were perceived as the closest to God. Families therefore respected these community leaders and listened and shared their messages. These two influential groups therefore could be used for the purpose of the early marriage in Tajikistan. Teachers thus could encourage the girls to stay at school longer regardless of whether they marry earlier or not. Education could provide the girls with skills they might use later whether it is bringing up their children or exploring other opportunities. Religious leaders at the same time could encourage the groom's families from either choosing an older bride, prevent different forms of domestic violence against young girls or provide some sort of support in case of marriage breakup.

10.2.4 Further research

The state, NGO and international organizations efforts would be more effective if the phenomenon of early marriage in Tajikistan is analysed and understood in greater depth. The hope is that, studies similar to this one could

be a foundation for exploring the phenomenon further. While this study focused on the main causes for lowering the age of marriage for girls, other aspects of the issue are left unexplored.

As discussed previously in chapter four, this study similar to many others was not free from limitations. Besides, as part of the PhD research, it was out of the scope of this study to analyse the phenomenon of early girls' marriage from all the different sides. This study was nevertheless the first to analyse the occurrence of the phenomenon in Central Asian or Tajik context. Through a qualitative approach, it looked into the causes behind the families' preference to choose an early age of marriage for their daughters. In doing so, the study identified three type of samples that contributed to understanding the questions the study was aimed to analyse from various angles. The sample included professionals or civil servants working at national and international organizations, families in preparation of marriage for their daughters and women both mothers and mothers-in-law. Although the chosen method was the best to find an answer to the questions the study was interested in, other information was identified during the study that even though was out of the scope of this research, could contribute to understanding the phenomenon in more depth.

Thus, as mentioned in chapter four, this study would benefit from a quantitative data that was not available at the time the research was conducted. Having a number indicating the prevalence of the phenomenon could encourage a better participation particularly from the professionals, most of whom believed early girls' marriage did not exist in Tajikistan. Secondly, the study lacked the involvement of young people, such as young men. Although

initially it was planned to conduct a focus group with young people aged 15-17 at school to understand their perception towards marriage role and appropriate age of marriage for girls, the plan was not realised due to the difficulty in obtaining permission. Moreover speaking to girls in private without their family members was also impossible. As Tajik families appreciate the collective type of unions and discourage privacy, I was not able to organize private discussions with girls without involving their parents or other family members. Besides, girls were below the age of 18 and it was thus ethically inappropriate to interview the girls that are considered children by ethical standards, without their parents' consent. It is important to note however that girls were not left out completely out of this study. They were part of the family observations, which I conducted for months. Therefore, when I represent the girls' opinion in this study where necessary I mostly draw on the observations and casual 'chats'.

It is vital to have some statistical data on the prevalence of early girls' marriage in Tajikistan. Currently, it seems that the state and other institutions take the phenomenon of early marriage as less significant in comparison to other gender related issues. However, the age of marriage could be associated or linked with many other issues that women are facing, such as school attendance, poverty, or even domestic violence. Demonstrating how many girls marry at the early age could thus increase the attention of the state, NGOs and international organizations and encourage further action.

Apart from the quantitative data, the *consequences* of early girls' marriage need to be studied in Tajikistan. Although, an extensive body of research exists

demonstrating the consequences of such a practice in other countries²⁰⁰, no research has been conducted on the phenomenon in Tajikistan or Central Asia. While the consequences might be similar to that of other countries, putting those in the context of Tajikistan or Central Asia could shed more light into 'life after early marriage'. It is important to understand what happens to girls when they quit school for marriage or agree to become second wives or out of desperation marry a widower with other children. It would similarly be interesting to learn more about the young girls getting married to migrants, who after the wedding leave their wives at home and travel to such countries as Russia for jobs. At the same time, understanding the consequences of early marriage for children is also very important. Not only could such research contribute to the existing knowledge on early girls' marriage in the country, but it could also serve as a motivation for developing policies and programs targeted at young people and children.

Furthermore, the perception of the young people towards such practice needs to be explored. A study on young Tajik men and women's attitudes towards early marriage could help to understand the values and aspirations of the young people. Depending on what the study might find, further work with young people could be undertaken to improve the gender imbalance in the country. Young people could learn about other possibilities apart from marriage, such as learning additional skills, finding employment or even self-employment opportunities. Moreover, young boys could be targeted through separate

²⁰⁰ See chapter 1 for literature review of the consequences in other context.

programs and activities to learn about gender equality and the negative effect of gender related practices, such as early marriage.

When discussing the early girls' marriage in Tajikistan and similar contexts, it is however important to be aware of the bias that the researcher might experience. Tajikistan is a patriarchal country, with a clear division of men and women's roles and where women are often viewed as heavily controlled, secluded and oppressed. Although I agree that patriarchy is thriving in the country, I suggest analysing gender and family relationships with an open mind rather than being guided through the expectation to see, what has been described by previous scholars, as dominance and submission. I think only when approaching Tajikistan and similar countries without a particular expectation or 'blindfold', one might find a new and an interesting way of interpreting the family and gender behaviour, which has not been discussed before and which therefore can enrich the discussion from a new perspective.

The practice of early girls' marriage in Tajikistan needs to be prevented because of the negative consequences such practices have on the wellbeing of the women and on the development of the country in general. During the field research, however, I met families who chose to marry off their daughters at such an early age due to the lack of other alternatives. Although they hoped their daughters would be happy at their new homes with their husbands providing financial support, love and care, in many cases such ambitions did not come true. As the marriage arrangement was out of the brides' families' control, girls were in a vulnerable position, finding themselves married to families where

they were not appreciated. The current study however did not look into the consequences of early marriage and the phenomenon has not been analysed in the country before. It is therefore difficult to point out how common such cases are when young girls are mistreated or abused in their new homes. However, examples exist that associate early marriage with negative experience of women in their husbands' houses. Polygamous unions, for example, where women get married as second wives and have no legal rights to claim any support for them or their children if the marriage ends (SADC, 2002). Another example could be the migrant wives, whose husbands travel to other countries leaving them in their parental home to provide care for their parents. Women in the second type of marriages can be abused by their in-laws physically or financially, but they also can be divorced easily through 'text messages' and thrown out of their husbands houses with children and no support (Olimova and Bosc, 2003). Therefore, even though I understand the despair of the families and their hopes in attempting to provide their daughters with sometimes the only available future security, marriage before the age of 18 does not seem to bring much happiness to many girls and their families, according to the examples above. I thus hope that this study can contribute to addressing the issue of early girls' marriage in the country in several ways.

First, I hope to bring the issue of early marriages in Tajikistan to the attention of both scholars, government and international donors. I hope this study, as the first to discuss the practice, will encourage further research and discussion of the issue. I also want the phenomenon to be recognized as a gender related issue existing in Tajikistan and targeted measures and actions to be taken. Thus, I would like to see the law on minimum marriage age to be strengthened

and implemented throughout the country. For that, the state needs to rethink and clarify its messages to the general population. It needs to emphasise the role of women not only as mothers and wives but also as social actors participating in the economy and development of the country. Apart from this, separate programs and actions tackling the marriage of girls before the age of 18, need to be prioritized by international organizations and implemented by NGOs in every corner of the country. Finally, the phenomenon of early girls' marriage should be targeted at the community level through influential community leaders, such as religious leaders. Targeting the practice from all possible aspects could influence the decisions made by the families in regards to the age of marriage and encourage looking for other alternatives to secure the girls future. With these aims in mind, I intend to share the results of this study among national and international organisations, governmental bodies and NGOs. I also intend to write and publish several articles from the study and share the results with the scholars to encourage further research and discussion.

Appendix 1

Interview questions for the professionals working at various state and non-state organizations, NGOs, Schools, Medical facilities.

Name:

Gender:

Educational background:

Current position:

Years of experience:

What do you know about early female marriages?

Do you think marriages of the girls below the age of 18 is common in Tajikistan?

If yes, then why?

If no, then why?

Do you think marriage age dropped in the recent years or it has always been low?

What do you know about the law on minimum marriage age in the country?

Do you think the minimum marriage age law prevents the age of marriage in the country?

If yes, in what ways?

If no, why do you think it is not working?

Which organization works to prevent the early female marriages in the country?

Has anyone ever reported the cases of early female marriages to your organization?

If yes, what measures did you take?

In your practice, have you ever come across a family who married off their daughter before the legal age and who were convicted?

What does your organization, school, or medical facility does to prevent early marriage?

What is your own experience with early female marriage in the country?

Have you or any of your relatives married off their daughters at an early age?

What other state attempts could you list to prevent early female marriages?

What do you think is the role of the Tajik females today?

What do you think the current state's idea about the Tajik females' role in contemporary Tajikistan?

What is your personal opinion about the age of the marriage for the girls? Do you think below 18 is normal or it is too early?

What do you think makes families choose early marriage for their daughters?

What do you think the girls could do today if they did not get married? Are there jobs available for the females? Could they continue their education?

Are there any services available for the girls who want to avoid the arranged marriage?

What do you think could be done to stop the girls' marriage before the legal age?

Do you have other issues related to early female marriages in the country that you would like to discuss?

Focus groups questions

Focus groups with women consisting of 6-7 people

Names:

Gender:

Educational background:

Current occupation:

Age:

Marital status:

How many children do you have?

Is anyone a mother-in-law and has a *kelin*?

If yes, how old the *kelin* was when married?

What is a marriage? How important it is for a Tajik individual? How about a female?

Does anyone have a daughter that is getting married soon or is married?

How old was your daughter when she got married or how old is she now when she is getting married?

At what age do you think the girls should get married?

Is it ok for the girls to get married at the age of 15? 16?

Have you ever heard about early marriages?

Do you think 15 is early for the girls to be married? How about 20?

Has the marriage always been so early? What age did you get married?

What do you think is the reason for the age of marriage to be earlier today?

What makes a girl ready for the marriage?

What qualities do you think a good *kelin* must possess?

If it is your daughter who is getting married? How would you ensure she has the qualities of a good *kelin*?

What happens if *kelin* is not what you expected?

Who arranges the marriages?

What is your role as a mother or a mother-in-law in arranging the marriages?

If you are a mother-in-law, was the girl chosen by your son? If not then was he consulted?

If you are mother of the bride, do you consult the girl before the marriage is arranged?

Do you think school is important for females?

Have you ever heard about educational quotas for females?

How about employment?

What is the main role of the woman today in Tajikistan?

Have you ever heard about the law on minimum marriage age?

If yes, then what does it say and where did you hear about it?

If no, how does it make you feel that your daughter/daughter-in-law is below the legal marriage age?

Have you ever heard of cases when a family has been convicted because of the early marriage for their daughters?

What would you do if someone came from *hukumat* saying you broke the law?

Have you ever heard about the president's order about not performing *nikokh* before the marriage is registered?

How do you deal with the order?

What does *mulloh* think about it?

Do you think the state encourages marriage at an early age or they are trying to prevent it with the law?

What else could a girl do if she is not married? What other roles are available for the girls?

Is there anything else you would like to share about marriage age for Tajik females?

Family interviews

The interviews with the families consisted of three people: a bride, a mother and usually a father or brother

Names:

Family status:

The age of the girl getting married:

Does the girl attend the school?

If not when did she stop?

If yes, will she continue after the marriage?

Who arranged the marriage?

Does the girl know her groom? Has she ever seen him before?

When arranging the marriage was the girl consulted?

Is she happy with the arrangement?

Do you know the groom and his family?

What made you accept this proposal?

Does the groom work/study?

Is the age she is getting married too early? Too late?

When do you think the girl is ready for the marriage, at what age?

Was the age of marriage always so early?

If not what do you think is the reason for the age of marriage to go down for the females?

What qualities should the girl possess to be ready for the marriage?

What is an ideal Tajik female like?

Who teaches her those skills?

Does she find it enjoyable to learn those skills?

Does she like school?

Would the girl like to be employed after she is married?

What else could the girl do if she is not married?

How important is the marriage for females?

What is the role of a female today in general?

Have you ever heard about the law on minimum marriage age?

If yes, what exactly you have heard?

If no, then now that you know, how does it make you feel to have your daughter married before the legal age?

What would you do if the local *hukumat* found out?

Why your family decided to have the girl married at this age?

Would you postpone her marriage if she were to work or study?

Have you ever heard about educational quotas?

Would you consider your daughter to go to University rather than being married?

How do you imagine the future of your daughter?

What measures would you take if your daughter ends up in a “bad” family?

If you had a power/authority, what would you change in the country?

What do you think about the state and its attitude towards the marriage in general? How about the girls’ marriage?

Is there anything else you would like to add about the age of marriage for Tajik females?

Appendix 2

Brief background information of quoted informants

Case studies

Pseudonym	Age	Family position	Place interviewed
Family 1			Dushanbe
Rukhsora	52	Mother	
Ravshan	63	Father	
Zamira	17	Daughter	
Family 2			Varzob
Tojiddin	53	Father	
Munavara	52	Mother	
Madina	19	Daughter	
Family 3			Safedorak
Zebo	41	Mother	
Rasul	52	Father	
Madina	16	Daughter	
Family 4			Dushanbe
Muslima	47	Mother	
Dilovar	52	Father	
Saida	16	Daughter	
Family 5			Safedorak
Gulrukhsor	59	Mother	
Rustam	60	Father	

Jamila	76	Grandmother	
Mavzuna	16	Daughter	
Family 6			Dushanbe
Nigina	42	Mother	
Boimurod	54	Father	
Nizora	16	Daughter	
Family 7			Dushanbe
Muhayo	65	Mother	
Anri	36	Brother	
Aziza	37	Daughter	
Family 8			Dushanbe
Mukarram	42	Mother	
Mirzo	65	Father	
Mavzuna	17	Daughter	
Family 9			Varzob
Nasiba	47	Mother	
Maksud	58	Father	
Munavara	15	Daughter	
Family 10			Safedorak
Umed	49	Father	
Latofat	47	Mother	
Munosib	17	Daughter	
Family 11			Safedorak
Nasim	23	Brother	

Nazokat	59	Mother	
Nodira	10	Daughter	
Manija	16	Daughter	
Family12			Dushanbe
Salomat	52	Mother	
Hamid	36	Brother	
Mukarram	16	Daughter	
Family 13			Varzob
Farrukh	59	Father	
Zarifa	52	Mother	
Musharaf	16	Daughter	
Family 14			Varzob
Amin	36	Brother	
Ramila	60	Mother	
Surayo	16	Daughter	Varzob
Family 15			Dushanbe
Rustam	52	Father	
Salomat	50	Mother	
Zubaida	35	Daughter	
Family 16			Safedorak
Shuhrat (S3CS)	42	Father	
Muslima	42	Mother	
Mukarram	16	Daughter	
Family 17			Varzob

Kalon	Father	66	
Gulya	Mother	65	
Pari	Daughter	16	
Family 18			Dushanbe
Sobir	42	Father	
Zulfiya	40	Mother	
Marziya	17	Daughter	
Family 19			Safedorak
Mutrib	58	Father	
Safina	52	Mother	
Malohat	18	Daughter	

Focus groups

Pseudonym	Age	Family position	Place interviewed
Munira (M1FG)	56	Mother	<i>Varzob</i>
Sayora (S1FG)	54	Mother	Varzob
(Musharaff (M2FC)	32	Mother-in-law	Safedorak
Sayora (S2FC)	48	Sister	Safedorak
Tahmina (T1FC)	48	Mother-in-law	Varzob
Barno (B1FC)	54	Mother-in-law	Varzob
Nazira (N1FC)	49	Mother-in-law	Dushanbe
Mahbuba (M3FC)	39	Mother	Safedorak
Soima (S3FC)	58	Mother-in-law	Dushanbe
Latofat (L1FC)	53	Mother-in-law	Dushanbe
Nazira (N2FC)	41	Mother	Safedorak
Nargis (N3FC)	49	Mother	Varoz
Nigora (N4FC)	62	Mother-in-law	Dushanbe
Zebo (Z1FC)	54	Mother	Varzob
Shoira (S4FC)	48	Mother	Dushanbe
Muhabbat (M4FC)	39	Sister	Safedorak

Professional interviews

Pseudonym	Age	Employment	Place interviewed
Nigora (N1PI)	48	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Safedorak</i>
Alijon (A1PI)	43	Teacher	Varzob
Kamoliddin (K1PI)	49	School director	Safedorak
Salim (S1PI)	32	Civil servant	Varzob
Samad (S2PI)	48	Civil servant	Dushanbe
Saadi (S3PI)	42	Civil servant	Varzob
Sodiq (S4PI)	52	Civil servant	Varzob
Sitora (S5PI)	49	Teacher	Safedorak
Gulrukhsor (G1PI)	33	ZAGS worker	Dushanbe
Nigora (N2PI)	42	ZAGS worker	Dushanbe
Farosat (F1PI)	43	ZAGS worker	Varzob
Aknazar (A2PI)	56	Civil servant	Varzob
Nigina (N3PI)	59	Civil servant	Dushanbe
Mukadas (M1PI)	48	Child Rights Department	Dushanbe

Glossary of Tajik terms

Akka: elder brother. The idiom also demonstrates respect. Thus not only brothers are referred to as Akka but also other older males

Appa: elder sister. The idiom also demonstrated respect. It is thus used not only towards the elder sisters in the family but to other older females

Avlod: an extended patriarchal family

Basmachi: anti-Soviet rebels of 1920-1930s in Central Asia

Bazarchik: a local small market place

Bibikhalifa: religious female teacher

Dastorkhon: is similar to a table cloth, but is usually spread on the floor

Dukhtar: girl, virgin. Refers to teenage girls before they get married

Dukhtarcha: little girl, pre-puberty

Folbin: spiritual female healer

Gavhora: traditional baby cot

Halol: The word *halol* or *halal* refers to food and drink in the west, but it also covers such matters of life as marriage and is translated as “religiously acceptable” in the dictionary.

Havli: front yard of the Tajik houses

Hujum: anti-veil campaign. The word hujum is translated into English as assault.

Hukumat: government, regional government

Hurmat: respect

Ishq: Love

Infidel: literally means “one without faith”, is referred towards people with no religious belief

Intelligentsia (Rus.): a latin word, described in the dictionary as: “a social class of people engaged in complex mental labour aimed at disseminating culture. This therefore might include everyone from artists to schoolteachers and book readers”.

Jadid (Arab.): a political movement at the end of nineteenth century

Kalym: bride price

Kolkhoz (Rus.): collective farm

Kurpacha: is made of cotton and it is used when sitting on floor

Marshrutka (Rus.): mini bus

Madrassah (Arab.): Islamic college

Mujohid: religious fighter in the name of Islam

Mulloh: religious leader

Mehru muhabbat: love and affection

Nawruz: literally means 'new day', a traditional spring holiday that represent the beginning of the year in Persian calendar

Nikokh: religious marriage ceremony

Otin: religious female teachers

Perestroika (Rus): literally means 'restructuring'. A political movement during 1980s to reform the economic and political system of the Soviet Union.

Plov: traditional food made with rice and meat

Qobil: diligent worker

Reklama (Rus): TV advertisement, commercial

Satr: a new type of veil adopted by young Tajik females covering head and shoulders

Somoni: Tajik currency

Sumalak: a sweet paste made from germinated wheat; prepared for Nawruz celebration

Sharm: shame, shameful

Shumo: direct translation 'you'. In Tajik language, 'shumo' is also used to address someone politely. It is usually used towards the stranger or older people.

Taloq: divorce

Tarbiya: teaching, upbringing

Toqi: traditional hat that varies from region to region

Zot: ancestors

Zanak: woman, also wife

ZAGS (Rus.): marriage registration offices in Tajikistan (and Central Asia) that were established during the Soviet time and still function

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