

# The logic of Islamic practice: a religious conflict in Central Asia<sup>1</sup>

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In the afterword to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism* and in the preface to the 2003 edition Edward Said expressed his regret at the continuing dominance of the ideological fictions of the ‘West’, the ‘East’ and ‘Islam’. These terms reduce ‘a heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex human reality’ to simple abstractions formulated ‘from an uncritically essentialist standpoint’.<sup>2</sup> Said’s *Orientalism* greatly contributed to deconstructing these fictions, showing how they acted as instruments of (neo-)colonial domination. Unfortunately, this has not prevented numerous subsequent attempts to essentialise ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ Islam in diverse political contexts. An army of ‘combative and woefully ignorant policy experts’, according to Said, continue to persuade themselves and the public about the reality of their abstract schemas, reproducing old and engendering new conflicts.

In similar vein, Devin DeWeese critiques what he terms ‘Sovietological Islamology’ in his review of Yaacov Ro’i’s *Islam in the Soviet Union*.<sup>3</sup> DeWeese contends that sovietologists in the West based their description of Islam on inadequate data and problematic sources, and that they merely reproduced the language of Soviet experts engaged in the project of managing the Muslim territories of the Soviet Union. One of the clichés put forward by Soviet experts and sovietologists was the opposition between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam (which was sometimes characterised as ‘folk’, or ‘everyday’ Islam). The former was treated as ‘pure’ Islam while the latter included many non-Islamic elements. DeWeese argues that this opposition implies ‘an essentially abstract ideal of Islam defined in quite narrow terms that would exclude much of the daily substance of religious life in most traditional Muslim societies’.<sup>4</sup> He gives many examples of how the categories of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam contradicted the reality of dynamically changing religious institutions and hierarchies, rituals and relations, interpretations and identities, which existed in ‘Soviet’ Islam.

The critique by Said and DeWeese of ‘expert’ knowledge of Islam, both of Islam in general and of ‘Soviet’ Islam, can also be applied to ‘post-Soviet’ Islam. The Soviet Union has disintegrated into different states with their own trajectories of development. However, much analysis of Islam in this vast space

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continues to be locked in simplistic schemes which contrast ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims. Only now in place of the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ dualism is an opposition between ‘traditionalism’ and ‘fundamentalism’. The first is described as moderate, liberal, rooted in the local history and national traditions of a specific society. The second is characterised by adjectives such as aggressive, radical, dogmatic, alien to the region, and dangerously cosmopolitan. This transformation in the representation of Muslim society in post-Soviet space is generated both by developments in global projects into which the states of the region are drawn, and also by local attempts to control and define Islam.

The differentiation between ‘traditional’ and ‘fundamentalist’ Islam is just as dubious and politically charged as the opposition posited between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam in the Soviet Union, which originated out of concerns over regional stability and conflict.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the actual situation is much more complex and confused. A diversity of groups and ‘parties’ operate within the political field who appeal to Islam in one way or another.<sup>6</sup> Dualistic characterisations are even more problematic at the level of local communities. Here, religious conflicts are often submerged within the dynamics of local political, kinship and economic relations, with each Muslim community containing its own interest groups and means of legitimacy.

This chapter concerns a religious conflict which broke out in the village of O. in Tajikistan at the end of the 1980s and which flared up dramatically in the early 1990s. Research was conducted by the author in 1995 when it had already largely died down. O. is an Uzbek<sup>7</sup> village situated in a mountainous region far from any urban centre, near the border with Uzbekistan. It constitutes the centre for a group of settlements which make up a rural *jamoat* (formerly known as a *selskii soviet*, a basic rural administrative unit) and a collective farm. With a few exceptions, the other settlements are offshoots of O. and maintain very close contacts with it. The population of O. is about 4,500, while that of the *jamoat* as a whole is a little more than 14,000. The events described in this chapter are typical of religious conflicts in late Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, but at the same time contain their own particular dynamics which are the focus of this chapter.

My analysis draws upon Pierre Bourdieu’s argument that ‘the analysis of the internal structure of a religious teaching has to take into account the socially constructed functions which it performs, first of all for the groups which produce it, and secondly for the groups which consume it’.<sup>8</sup> I argue that an analysis of religious conflict in O. in terms of a simple dichotomy between traditional and fundamentalist Islam significantly distorts the real picture of opposition and alliance which exists in the village. The religious conflict centred on the competition between various forms of religious specialist, each drawing upon different sources of knowledge and authority, for control of the religious life of O. It was not only about theological or ideological differences, but was intimately bound up in local politics, with competition over control over symbolic and material resources, and with the re-distribution of financial resources in a period of crisis and state reconstruction. Participants in this conflict legitimated their cause and attacked their rivals through a variety of claims such as those based on genealogy

and hereditary titles, through rituals and claims to the control of holy sites and places of worship. Specifically religious arguments are laced with moralising discourse accusing opponents of greed and hypocrisy, and are filled with personal insult and hostility. All parties insisted upon their own version of ‘correct’ Islam and ‘orthodoxy’, and tried to present themselves as ‘real’ Muslims. It is absurd to reduce this diversity to an opposition between ‘traditionalism’ and ‘fundamentalism’.

### **Descendents of saints: *hoja*, *ishan*, *tura* and *shaykh***

Bourdieu writes that ‘the formation of the religious sphere results from the monopolisation of contacts with the supernatural world by a group of specialists’.<sup>9</sup> The religious sphere in O. is divided among three groups, the descendents of Muslim saints, *mahsums* (those from families acknowledged to possess knowledge of Islam), and *hajis* (those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca). In one way or another all these groups tried to dominate either the whole religious sphere or parts of it. Together they form ‘the market of religious merit’ where ‘religious goods are produced, reproduced, stored and distributed’ and where ‘consumers with the necessary religious competency satisfy their needs’.<sup>10</sup> Competition in the religious sphere is not directed solely at augmenting religious authority, but also at obtaining material resources such as payment for various religious services, the size of which directly depend on the level of symbolic capital that these religious practitioners are able to command.

I will start my analysis with the descendents of saints.<sup>11</sup> This group did not play a direct part in the conflict. Nevertheless, I mentioned them because the local residents of O. associate Islam with descendents of saints who symbolise it and embody its sacred powers. Furthermore, in similar conflicts in other Muslim communities in the region descendents of saints were not just impartial observers but active participants. In O., therefore, they were seen as potential actors even though this proved not to be the case in this instance.

The descendents of saints in O. are migrants to the village. They make up three separate lineages, namely, *hoja*,<sup>12</sup> *ishan*<sup>13</sup> and *tura*<sup>14</sup>. *Hojas* were the first to settle in O. and local residents remember Rahmatullahon, who lived there in the middle of the nineteenth century, as being the first. *Ishans* first settled in O. at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unlike the *hojas*, who trace their genealogy to the *chor-yor*, the Rightly Guided Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, *ishans* claimed they were direct descendents of Muhammad or, to be precise, his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali.<sup>15</sup> *Ishans* considered themselves to be more noble than *hojas*. The *tura* lineage settled in O. later than other descendents of saints and unlike them they came from further away. *Hojas* and *ishans* were from a neighbouring village, A., and to maintain their status they appeal to their most recent ancestors who are still remembered by the local population. The *tura* use a different strategy. They claim to originate directly from Bahouddin Naqshband, founder of the famous Naqshbandiyya Sufi brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> As Bahouddin Naqshband lived in Bukhara, the *tura* claim their ancestors were Bukharans.

Genealogy (*shajara*) and titles are the main symbolic capital of the descendents of saints.<sup>17</sup> Descent from well-known figures from early Islamic history and members of the local nobility elevate descendents of saints above common people. It bestows upon them certain qualities which generate respect and even awe.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, claims to descent from Muslim saints are contested, and some are clearly fictitious. People often accuse their rivals of fabricating their lineages and there is an unspoken dispute between the *hojas*, *ishans* and *turas* over who is the most noble and saintly. This dispute, however, has never turned into a serious confrontation.

The practice of endogamous marriages is one of the main strategies used by descendents of saints to maintain their identity and symbolic capital,<sup>19</sup> and marriages are often between different 'saintly' families. Here, the competition to be more 'noble' gives way to a union of different groups. This marital strategy allows lineage members to build on the sacred assets of other families. It is worth mentioning that the ethnic origin of the parties involved does not play a significant role. Thus, the *hoja* and *ishan* families are closely related. They often intermarry and now represent one large kinship group. The *turas* adopted a different strategy in that they contracted marriages beyond the village of O. to Kokand in Uzbekistan and other places where relations of one of their most important ancestors, Iskanderhon, still reside.

*Mazars*, the burial sites of their ancestors, constitute a major asset for descendents of saints. Despite attempts to repress religious practice by the Soviet state and the spread of secular education, a significant number of people continue to visit these holy places for healing, obtaining prophecy and invoking supernatural aid. Pilgrims to *mazars* give offerings called *nazr* which may include money, clothing, or food, and this constitutes an income as well as a symbolic asset for the *ishans* and *hojas*. Descendents of saints try to attract pilgrims by emphasising the importance of their holy lineage. They spread stories about the miraculous powers of their ancestors and about pilgrims to their holy sites who obtained cures, whose wishes were granted, who had dream encounters with saints, and who were given accurate prophesies.<sup>20</sup>

One such *mazar*, which belongs to the *hojas*, is the burial place of Rahmatullahon and his son Ishan-hoja and other members of the lineage. It is a place of local pilgrimage and local residents come to visit the shrine on family occasions such as certain celebrations or funerals. The *mazar* is situated in the courtyard of a *hoja* house right in the centre of O., separate from the village cemetery, a fact which emphasises its exclusive status.

The *ishans* do not have their own burial places in O. The *mazar* where their ancestor Kazihon is buried and which is considered to be a holy site is located in the neighbouring village of D. *Ishans* settled in O. have not created their own family *mazar* partly out of respect for the memory of Kazihon and partly because of the lack of charismatic leaders. They choose to exploit the popularity and fame of already existing shrines.

The burial place of Iskanderhon-tura competes with the shrines of the *hojas*. Iskanderhon's *mazar* is located in the courtyard of a house belonging to a

prominent *tura* family. Despite the fact that it is more recent than the *hoja* shrines and is a burial place for only one saint it has been visited on a massive scale. It is popular not only with the local villagers, but also with residents of the neighbouring villages, both Uzbek and Tajik. The shrine is popular because of its connection to Bahouddin Naqshband, and people mainly make all their offerings to him.

Any member of a saintly family is a potential religious leader. In the past, it is likely that descendents of the saints became mullahs who read prayers during family rituals and ceremonies and acted as leaders and organisers of religious gatherings. This is still the case in some villages, but in O. male members of the saintly families only look after *mazars* and administer *nazr*. Although their religious status allows them to strive for more, fierce competition from numerous *mahsums* (members of families renowned for religious learning) diminishes their chances of becoming mullahs. I witnessed how an *ishan* was asked to perform the duties of a mullah, but it usually happened on exceptional occasions.<sup>21</sup> Women from saintly families, however, play a more significant role in the religious life of O. acting, for example, as *bu-otins* who organise the religious gatherings of women.<sup>22</sup> One of the most influential *bu-otins* is from the *tura* lineage.<sup>23</sup>

The descendents of the saints try to find their niche in the social structure of the village, a role that maintains their particular status and allows them to convert their symbolic and social capital into other perhaps more tangible resources.<sup>24</sup> However, neither representatives of the *ishan* nor *hoja* families were known to have attained any social positions of significance in other spheres of activity. Perhaps the only exception was a member of the *tura* lineage who had worked as brigadier in the collective farm for 20 years and then became a businessman.

*Shaykhs*<sup>25</sup> are closely linked to the descendents of the saints and perform the same function of looking after shrines. The village of O. is located on the pilgrimage route (*ziyosat*) to a major 'nature shrine' (a shrine which constitutes a natural feature such as a mountain or tree rather than a man-made structure) on top of a mountain. A mythical saint is buried at this spot and, according to local residents, it covers a vast region of a dozen villages including O. In the summer, pilgrims from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan visit the place in their thousands. While at the site, these people require various services such as accommodation and food, performing prayers and telling stories about the sacred place. These services are supplied by *shaykhs* who do not claim to be descendents of the saints. This is unusual, as most Central Asian *shaykhs* of large *mazars* have the status of *hoja* or *ishan*.

Nature shrines are the only resource of *shaykhs*. Unlike the descendents of the saints who inherently embody holiness and can be mullahs and healers, *shaykhs* do not try to take on any other roles apart from looking after nature *mazars*. Thus, they do not pose a threat to other Muslim leaders and are not subject to persecution either from the government or other Muslim groups. *Shaykhs* do not have a saintly pedigree, aristocratic kinship ties or a hereditary aura of holiness, the attributes that the descendents of the saints so actively exploit. However, the nature *mazars* that the *shaykhs* administer are usually more popular and better known outside O. than the ancestral tombs of the *turas* and *hojas*. *Shaykhs* receive

social status and a reasonable income from the *mazars* in the form of material offerings.

### **Mahsums and Hajis**

Alongside shrine visitation and other mystical practices, which are monopolised by the descendents of the saints, there is a vast religious field of household life cycle rituals such as that marking the birth of a child and putting him or her in a cradle (*beshik-tuy*), circumcision (*hatna-y-tuy*), marriage (*nikoh-tuy*), funerals and commemoration rituals. There are also the Muslim feasts celebrating the end of the fast of Ramadan (*ruza-hayit*), the feast of sacrifice (*qurbon-hayit*), the ritual of *hudoii*<sup>26</sup> and others. Key figures in this religious domain are mullahs<sup>27</sup> who officiate the day-to-day religious life of Muslims. The mullahs elect imams<sup>28</sup> who act as their leaders and who organise the daily and Friday prayers (*namoz*) in the mosques or, in the absence of the latter, in private homes. The title 'imam' is unofficial and is attributed to a person on the basis of the candidate's knowledge and authority as recognised by the local community. However, this position was formalised by the state in the 1980s as I will discuss below.

Within Islam there is no official 'clergy'. Any Muslim, depending on his religious education and knowledge can theoretically lead collective prayers, be a judge or a teacher, and be called a mullah. However in many communities in Central Asia particular 'classes' or 'clans' have been popularly recognized as educated and respected Muslims and are given privileges, titles and status. Membership is hereditary and does not depend on an individual's personal achievements.

During the Soviet period the role of mullah was monopolised in the village of O. by a group who bore the title of *mahsum*, which meant that they were recognized as belonging to families educated in religion and recognised as mullahs. One of the most prominent of these *mahsum* families trace their origins to Saparmat-domla.<sup>29</sup> The most famous mullah from among his sons was Abdudjabbar-mahsum, who studied at madrasas (Muslim higher educational institutions) in Kokand and Bukhara and worked as a mullah in one of the mosques in Katta-kurgan, a big settlement between Bukhara and Samarkand. For a long time Abdudjabbar-mahsum acted as an unofficial imam in O. and during the Soviet period secretly led collective prayers on the premises of a local carpet-weaving factory.<sup>30</sup> Many of Abdudjabbar-mahsum's sons also followed in his footsteps and performed the function of a mullah (*mullochilik*).

Abdudjabbar's elder brother did not practice *mullochilik*, and some of his children stopped practising Islam altogether. His daughter was one of the first women to abandon her veil and work as a saleswoman at the local shop. This was a brave step in the context of that period. His eldest son was a member of the Communist Party, was the chairman of a collective farm for a short time, after which he became the manager of a local shop. However, Abdudjabbar's two other sons did become mullahs. One of them, Abdumutal-mahsum, was born in 1919 and worked as a carpenter at a local school. In the 1980s he became mullah in one

of the outlying districts of O. His second son, Abdukahhar-mahsum, became an unofficial imam after the death of Abdudjabbar-mahsum. Abdukahhar died in 1985 and left seven sons, two of whom became mullahs.

After Abdukahhar's death, a representative of another *mahsum* family, Abdumumin-mahsum, took over the role of imam in O. The latter's father had studied in a madrasa in Kokand and at some point had been a mullah in O. before Abdudjabbar-mahsum. Abdumumin was born in 1937 and in the late 1950s left the village of O. He had lived for a long time in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan where he worked as a driver, plumber and a watchmaker. He studied to become a mullah in Kokand. In the late 1980s with the support of the local authorities he was elected as the official imam.

There are a few other less prominent *mahsum* families in O. but members of these do not at present act as mullahs. During my fieldwork in 1995 the official imam, Abdumumin-mahsum, served the lower part of the village. The upper part of the village and the cemetery with its neighbouring houses were served by other mullahs from the two prominent *mahsum* families. Abdumutal-mahsum and one of Abdukahhar-mahsum's sons were mullahs in neighbouring villages. Each of them performed prayers during family rituals within 'their territory'. These family events provide *mahsums* with a modest but stable income which includes a small sum of money, food and pieces of fabric. In addition, these events give *mahsums* a prominent role in public life and a forum through which they might seek to regulate and influence people's private lives. These events strengthen their social and symbolic capital.

Women's religious practice is separate from men's, and women members of *mahsum* families acted as *bu-otins*. One of the most prominent *bu-otins* in O. is a daughter of Abdukahhar-mahsum. During family rituals the *bu-otin* often duplicates the prayers and rituals performed by mullahs in the male section of the house. *Bu-otins* also officiate at specifically female ritual gatherings such as *bushanba*, and *mushkul-kushod* (held to invoke divine aid in solving problems), and *mavlyud-oshi* (a commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad).<sup>31</sup> Female religious practice is the only area where the interests of *mahsums* and the descendents of the saints intersect and which creates some competition between them, although this is not open or aggressive.<sup>32</sup>

In their competition with the descendents of saints *mahsums* do not claim a hereditary tie to a saint or special divine abilities as the former do. Rather, they draw upon their reputation and status as transmitters of Islamic knowledge, their ability to read Arabic, translate religious texts and their knowledge of prayers. However, these are not obtained through training and attendance at higher religious institutions. It is assumed that this knowledge is transferred from generation to generation within their families. The Soviet period, when official Islamic educational institutions were largely inaccessible and the only religious education available was within the family, was the golden era for the *mahsums*.

Similar to the descendents of the saints, *mahsums* attempt to preserve and enhance their status through marriage. For example, the mother of Abdumumin-mahsum, the imam of O., is a sister of a well-known mullah in O. who has

founded his own dynasty of *mahsums*. However, *mahsums* are not required to marry exclusively within the group and their authority and position as mullah is not guaranteed by social standing alone. In their competition with rivals over their positions and the related income and symbolic resources *mahsums* emphasise their personal piety and preach that Islam should be purified from outside influences. At the same time they call into question the piety of their real and potential competitors. This causes frictions between and sometimes within *mahsum* families.

A further source of conflict between *mahsum* families was the formalisation of the post of imam into an official position in the 1980s (as was the case of mullahs, this function had previously been outside state regulation) and the appointment of Abdumumin-mahsum to this post. As official imam he was accountable to the district (*raion*) imam, who in turn was under the imam for the province (*oblast*). The republican *kazi-kalon* was at the top of the religious hierarchy and was the head of the Tajik division of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, which became an independent body controlled by the Tajik authorities in the beginning of the 1990s. In effect, official imams became part of the state administrative structure and were answerable to local government. They were appointed by local authorities and the opinion of active believers ceased to play a decisive role in the process.

Abdumumin-mahsum attempted to use his access to administrative authority to extend his jurisdiction into the territories of other *mahsums*. When this failed, he demanded that they pay him a part of the income from their activities as mullahs, citing legislation on religious activity and instructions from his superiors. His attempts were met by fierce resistance from other mullahs. *Mahsums* from the family descended from Saparmat-domla (whose members had filled the role of imam in O. before Abdumumin) categorically refused to acknowledge the official mullah's authority and pay him part of their income.

In the late 1980s *mahsums* faced competition from a new rival group of mullahs who I will provisionally refer to as *hajis*. Members of this group were not defined in terms of lineage, descent from Muslim saints, or by a family tradition of religious learning. In an interview, one of the *mahsums* told me that they were not real mullahs, because their ancestors did not practice *mullochilik* (act as mullahs). However, he also stated that anyone who is able to recite from memory a few basic prayers (particularly those relating to funerals and funeral commemorations—*janoza*)<sup>33</sup> could be considered a mullah. Rather than lineage or inherited status, *hajis* base their claims to religious authority primarily upon the fact that they have made the pilgrimage to Mecca which gives them the right to the prestigious title of *haji*.<sup>34</sup>

The informal leader of *hajis* in O., Ergash-haji, was born in 1938 into a family of wealthy cattle farmers. In the second half of the 1930s, at the height of the Soviet confiscation of the property of wealthy peasants, the family moved to a neighbouring Tajik village. They returned to O. only in the 1970s. In the 1980s Ergash-haji became interested in religion and managed to obtain religious learning either in the Tajik city of Khodjent or the Uzbek city of Namangan. Two of



Ergash-haji's closest followers are his cousin Djura-haji and a distant relative Mirzokarim-haji. Djura-haji was the first of them to visit Mecca, in 1993, followed by Ergash-haji in 1994 and Mirzakarim in 1995. Since then people in the village have addressed them as *haji*.

As is the case of the *mahsums*, nobody in O. knows the exact nature of the kinship ties between the *hajis* but everyone emphasises the fact that they are related. The reference to kinship has a rhetorical character, since in fact all the inhabitants in O. can trace kinship ties to each other. Therefore, local discourses on kinship ties are not so much concerned with tracking accurate genealogies as a question of the selective actualisation of certain ties to create alliances and coalitions. It is difficult to say whether *hajis* utilise kinship as a means to widen or support the network of their followers. I was unable to build up trusting relationships with members of this group. However, it is clear that those in the village who observe the conflict between mullahs refer to it in terms of kinship. Thus, the struggle between the *hajis* and *mahsums* for religious primacy is locally understood not just as a clash over religious disagreements, but more importantly as a conflict between two groups, each formed on the basis of kinship loyalties.

In fact, Ergash-haji's first wife was the daughter of a local mullah and his own daughter was married to Kushnazar-mahsum, a member of a Saparmat-domla's family. Thus, he potentially has indirect access to the symbolic resources of the *mahsums*. This, however, has not resulted in the merging of the two groups. The fact that Ergash-haji is related to *mahsums* is not spoken of much and Kushnazar-mahsum is not known to be a supporter of the *hajis*.

In rivalry for leadership, Ergash-haji used a more convincing argument than kinship, namely, his material wealth which enabled him to undertake charitable works. For example, he financed the construction of the main official mosque.<sup>35</sup> He also paid for the construction of a minaret from which *azans* are performed (the call to prayers). There were rumours that he paid the salaries of the mosque's *muezzins*.<sup>36</sup> Such generosity was unusual to local residents and they attributed it to the enormous wealth Ergash-haji accumulated through trading ventures in Russia. Mirzokarim-haji and Djura-haji were also traders.

The strategies of *hajis* and *mahsums* are very different. While *hajis* invest their wealth to earn symbolic capital, *mahsums* exploit the symbolic capital derived from their inherited status to make money.<sup>37</sup> This of course does not mean that *hajis* are absolutely altruistic, but merely that they are not interested in short-term economic gain. They seek social and symbolic gains, the respect of their neighbours and moral authority, as well as to increase the number of their supporters. The demonstration of their charitable sponsorships enables them to contrast themselves with the *mahsums* who they accused of using people's religious feelings for their own gain.<sup>38</sup> Thus, this altruism served the 'self-interested purpose' of 'a down payment that is required by any prophetic enterprise'.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of their financial sponsorship, in the mid-1990s the *hajis* became the dominant force in the official mosque and it became the principal site through which they exercised their influence. It reached a point where the official imam Abdumumin-mahsum, who had started preaching at the mosque only on

Fridays, stopped going there altogether because his status was usurped and he felt he owed something to the *hajis*. Instead, young mullahs, the sons of Mirzakarim-haji and Djura-haji, performed services in the mosques in an unofficial capacity. Gradually, other *mahsums* stopped going to the mosque and together with their followers gathered on Fridays in a prayer house (*dahma*) near the cemetery. Thus, the *hajis* managed to monopolise the mosque, one of the main Islamic symbols of O. which was central to the Muslim (as well as community) identity.

The *hajis*, however, were not able to extend their influence beyond O. to the neighbouring settlements, and were opposed by local state authorities. After the death of the leading mullah in one of these neighbouring settlements the *hajis* supported the election of a young man of 25 who was one of their supporters. This was discussed by the chairman of the collective farm and other local officials, including the head of the district police who claimed that the young man was identified as unreliable by the KGB. As a result, the local government appointed Abulborimahsum from another village to be head mullah. This person's father, a well-known mullah born in O., had received his religious education before the Soviet period and had reportedly been a district religious judge (*kazi*) in 1920s.<sup>40</sup> In the 1930s he had been arrested and deported. As a representative of a *mahsum* family and someone who was not involved in any of the local conflicts, Abdulbori appealed to the local government as the most suitable candidate.

One of the main, but not the only, strategies the *hajis* employed was to present themselves as conforming to 'correct' Islam while asserting that the *mahsums* did not. According to Bourdieu, to win in the religious field, one has to '... overthrow the existing symbolic (i.e. clerical) order and symbolically secure its overthrow ...'.<sup>41</sup> That is, they have to avoid playing by the old rules and change these rules to their benefit. They questioned the adequacy of the education of the older established mullahs and accused them of not being able to read prayers correctly, of being ignorant of many of the tenets of Islam, and of failing to protect Islam from syncretic accretions. They presented themselves, by contrast, as the bearers of 'real' Islam and therefore worthy of leading the process of cleansing local morals and practices from 'un-Islamic' influences. To demonstrate their devotion to 'real' Islam, *hajis* stopped wearing 'Western' clothes and changed their non-Muslim names into Muslim ones (although most villagers could not remember those new names). To emphasise their piety they started to follow rigorously the scriptural prescriptions of daily prayer, fasting during Ramadan, and abstaining from alcohol. These were religious duties which most villagers, including *mahsums* and the descendants of saints, had ignored during the Soviet period.<sup>42</sup> Ergash-haji publicly took a second wife, demonstrating his right to live according to Muslim laws.<sup>43</sup> As Bourdieu argues 'the game of increasing values, always somewhat aggressive, the insistence with which one supposedly should be reminded of respect for the fundamental law of the universe, and the rejection of economism can only succeed by serving as exemplary confirmations of the sincerity of rejection'.<sup>44</sup>

The performance of rituals constituted the primary site of conflict between *hajis* and *mahsums*.<sup>45</sup> Discussions about funeral commemorations, which were one of the main markers of Muslim identity during the Soviet period, were especially

heated. There is no universally accepted way of performing rituals in Central Asia. Every region, even every village, has its particular historically developed practices. In O. the deceased are washed on the day of death or the day after, mullahs read the *janoza* (funeral prayer) and perform the *davra*, a ritual by which the sins of the dead are forgiven and collectively taken on by the living. After this the deceased is buried. For four days after the funeral (five if the person is buried on the same day of death) close relatives of the deceased slaughter sheep or goats and prepare food for guests who come to the funeral commemoration.<sup>46</sup> During the next 39 days funeral meals (*jumalik*) are held every Thursday evening. On the thirty-ninth day a *hatmi-qur'on* (reading of the Qur'an) is held in the home of the deceased, a sheep or goat is slaughtered and friends, relatives and neighbours are invited for a meal. The following day women who have experienced a recent death in their family are invited for a meal. This marks the beginning of the mourning period for close relatives who now don mourning clothes. Commemoration feasts are held on the fifth, seventh, ninth or eleventh month (it should be an odd number). This ends the mourning period for women. The day before the first anniversary of the death a *hatmi-qur'on*<sup>47</sup> is held. All these events are accompanied by prayers and the giving of gifts to mullahs.

*Hajis* opposed two main elements of the funeral cycle rituals which they condemned as 'distortions of real Islam', the *davra* and the series of funeral feasts. They accused *mahsums* of condoning them because of their incompetence and desire for material profit. Ergash-haji insisted that the practice of *davra* should be abandoned because it is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an and because it allowed the personal responsibility for sins of the deceased to be replaced by the impersonal collective responsibility of the living. In addition, Ergash-haji's supporters opposed the feasts held by the relatives during the five days after the funeral. They called for a reduction of this period to three days and for a reduction in spending on feasts which they considered unreasonable and costly, and therefore non-Islamic. Some residents of O. heeded these calls but interpreted them in different ways. For example, some would slaughter a sheep for the funeral feast not in their own home but in a neighbour's house, thus trying to avoid breaking the prohibition.

*Mahsums*, too, joined in calls to 'purify' Islam in order to attack their opponents, the descendents of saints with their magical practices. Some *mahsums*, for example, supported the calls to cut the excessive expenditure on funerals.<sup>48</sup> However, in this competition over reformist credentials they could not outdo the more radical *hajis*. Lacking the charisma and aggression of the *hajis* they fell back on calls for conservatism and moderation.<sup>49</sup> In response to the criticism by the *hajis* about funeral feasts, they appealed to local traditions of hospitality which dictated that guests should be offered food. In response to accusations of greed, the *mahsums* and other opponents of the *hajis* questioned the sources of the *hajis*' own wealth. They used arguments drawn from Soviet rhetoric, which accused private traders of 'speculating' and making 'unjust income, and asserted that while the *hajis* were trading and living in Russia they could not have avoided breaking Muslim norms. This tactic was effective in that it tapped into social

tensions and conflicts intensely felt in the 1990s when the economic crisis hit most of the local population very hard.

Abdumumin–mahsum took a very different and flexible stance on the matter. He neither openly criticised Ergash-haji nor supported him. He reportedly said, ‘I don’t care, let people do as they wish’. His position surprised people and attracted criticism from opponents. Many were shocked by his conduct during rituals, when he would make jokes and talk on irrelevant subjects. He did not strictly follow all religious prescriptions and demonstratively avoided imposing formal rules on people. I heard villagers referring to him as ‘what a mullah!’ with a mixture of approval and hidden reproach. However, the local government represented by the chairman of the collective farm, head of local *jamoat* and other local officials supported this position. They were suspicious of the aggressive proselytism of Ergash-haji and the descendents of Saparmat-domla.

### The arrival of the ‘Wahhabis’

In their struggle for dominance in the religious field, the *hajis* have introduced new criteria for legitimacy and authority. In addition to the established ties of kinship and marriage, these include the sponsorship of mosques and other demonstrations of charity and piety, strict adherence to the formal rules of Islam, the adoption of Muslim names and clothes, and reform of local ritual practices. Manipulating these instruments depending on the situation, *hajis* have wrested a social space from *mahsums* and have altered the local Muslim identity.

A central point in disputes over what constitutes ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ Islam was the interpretation of ‘tradition’. Claims by *mahsums* to religious leadership were founded on the authority of their ancestors and constituted with reference to the local social context of O. By contrast the *hajis* tried to build ties with the external world as a means of legitimising their claims for leadership. For example, they used their pilgrimage to Mecca as unquestionable proof that they knew first hand how other Muslims ‘really’ lived and thus were qualified to advocate reforms of religious practice in conformity with these standards. Islamic preachers from outside the area sent by government and non-government institutions (the distinction between those institutions in late 1980s and early 1990s was blurred) provided another source of legitimacy for the *hajis*.<sup>50</sup> These preachers attempted to mobilise support and recruit followers for their activities outside the village. For their part, local groups in O. attempted to utilise the authority of these outsiders to redistribute the balance of power at the local level.

Preachers from Uzbekistan arrived in O. in the late 1980s and soon became frequent visitors. Informants from the village hazily recalled that they were referred to as ‘Wahhabis’ from the city of Namangan.<sup>51</sup> During the Muslim feasts of *ruza-hayit* and *qurbon-hayit* they used to live in O. for several days, preaching during the festive prayers and trying to promote their ideas.<sup>52</sup> During these feasts they collected money to organise new schools and ‘revive’ Islam. These articulate young people in white clothes attracted a lot of people, who were literally shocked by their unusual appearance and speech.<sup>53</sup> In the early

1990s most of these mullahs from Namangan were imprisoned by the Uzbekistan government and their visits to O. ceased.

In 1991–1992, the religious conflict in O. took a dramatic turn. To understand the course of events, it is necessary to refer to the events that took place in Tajikistan as a whole in those years. In the autumn of 1991 after the coup in Moscow the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Nabiev, became the first president of the country. He reached an informal peace agreement with the opposition, which included the ‘Rastohez’ movement, the Democratic Party and the Islamic Renaissance Party. These groups were now able to operate legally and quickly strengthened their political position. However, the peace agreement ended with a new conflict in 1992 and the opposition organised a protest on Shohidon Square in Dushanbe, opposite Nabiev’s residence, demanding the president’s resignation, a new constitution, and new parliamentary elections. Later, pro-government forces organised an alternative protest. Soon the political conflict assumed a religious, and later a regional, character.<sup>54</sup> In April and May of that year the opposition won a series of political victories. It managed to gain control of parliament and forced the resignation of some of its opponents. Armed battles started in May when the opposition seized a number of buildings in Dushanbe. Local governments in Kulyab and Leninabad oblasts did not recognise the opposition and took governance into their own hands. In 1992, The National Front, made up of various political and regional groups, took control of Dushanbe and drove the opposition out of the capital. The civil war had begun.

At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, at the height of the opposition’s victories in Dushanbe, a Tajik mullah named Abdugaffar came to O. The circumstances of his appearance in O were completely different from those of ‘Wahhabis’. Abdugaffar was appointed as official mullah to the local mosque by the order of the *raion* and *oblast* imams. He had an official licence to carry out religious activities and received a salary from the religious governing bodies. Abdumumin-mahsum was relieved of his duties. This replacement was endorsed by the secular authorities and the *raion* and *oblast* officials were present when Abdugaffar assumed his post. His appointment took place within the framework of the government’s policy of legalising Islam in the last years of the Soviet Union and the first years of Tajikistan’s independence. The fact that a Tajik imam was appointed to an Uzbek village which had its own candidates for the post indicates that the state authorities saw Abdugaffar as a propagator of the government line, an ‘agent’ within the national minorities.

Abdugaffar was born in 1957 in Novo-Matchinskii *raion*<sup>55</sup> in Tajikistan. After his appointment as imam, he moved with his family to O. and the local village council provided him with accommodation. Nobody in O. knew his background. Villagers I spoke to were not sure whether he was from a family of mullahs like the *mahsums*, or was from a class of new mullahs like the *hajis*, or even from a family of the descendents of the saints.<sup>56</sup> This lack of knowledge indicates that he was not important to the villagers of O. In fact many did not even remember his name and simply called him ‘Matchai-mullah’ since he came from Matcha. He lived in O. for no more than two years.

These events took place when the opposition coalition, led by the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), had seized effective power in Dushanbe. Matchai-mullah advocated ideas that formed the ideological platform of the IRPT,<sup>57</sup> although he was probably not a full member, but only a sympathiser of the party.<sup>58</sup> In his sermons he called for the simplification of rituals, abstinence from alcohol and gambling, and strict individual responsibility for sins. His gentle manners made him a popular person in the village. Many people still remember him as a 'good person' and recall his preaching with approval. They remember how 'beautifully' he recited the prayers (local mullahs often misread the prayers because they learned them from their parents), how he could translate from Arabic and was fluent in Uzbek. The fact that he did not support or belong to any local coalitions and groups added to his popularity. He always tried to be impartial and appealed to all Muslims. Therefore his suggestions for reform appeared more sincere than those of the *hajis* whose non-Muslim past was well known in the village. However, Abdugaffar was not entirely 'altruistic'. The religious reforms he advocated would have made the imam the main source of Islamic legitimacy in the village, concentrating significant powers in his hands in the religious sphere.

The *hajis* supported the new imam as he was ideologically close to them and hoped that he would change the balance of power between the rival groups of mullahs in the village. Until 1991 Ergash-haji and his followers were in implicit opposition to the secular authorities since their business success meant that they were not dependent on the collective farm management. With the appearance of the new imam, however, they unexpectedly found support from an official religious organisation endorsed by the government. The political success of the IRPT in the middle of 1992, fuelled by discontent with the previous Communist regime, encouraged the *hajis* and reinforced their strategies in struggles for dominance in the local religious sphere.

During this period Matchai-mullah and the *hajis* launched a campaign for religious reform in O. One of their main demands upon everyone who called themselves Muslim was to perform prayers five times a day in the official mosque which they controlled. Ergash-haji and his followers used to go to people's houses calling on them to go to the mosque, carrying out a sort of moral and religious 'terror'. Many of my informants said that they had to obey at that time because 'most people in O. were followers of the reformers'. Changes were introduced into the way the prayers were performed. For example, it was forbidden to perform *namoz* without a head covering. One of the most significant innovations was the fact that women, especially older women, were allowed to take part in daily prayers and they were given a designated place in the mosque. In this way the reformers tried to influence and control the female section of the Muslim community.

In addition to instituting religious reforms, Abdugaffar used his official status to expand his influence into government structures and institutions, such as the local *jamoat* and schools, which had previously been free from religious influence. People started inviting the new imam to sanctify the legally required civil registration of marriage at the *jamoat*. Arabic lessons were introduced into the

schools which practically constituted the introduction of Islamic primary education, and there were calls for boys and girls to be taught separately.

At one point the local authorities submitted to pressure from the new mullahs. For example, the local *jamoat* actively supported and collected money for a protest by IRPT supporters in Dushanbe. In September 1992 the most respected and influential local political actor, the collective farm chairman, a Communist and Hero of the Soviet Union who was also a deputy in the national parliament, was among a group of deputies arrested along with president Nabiev. Nabiev was forced to resign. This frightened the once powerful and independent chairman. He started attending the mosque for prayers on major feast days which he had not done previously. However, this did not bring him closer to the *hajis* and his relationship with them remained tense.

Gradually, during 1992, the mood in O. changed in line with the unfolding events in the country as a whole. On 24 August an armed gang murdered the Chief Republican Public Prosecutor, Huvaidulloev, a Tajik originally from a village near O. The resulting local discontent with the national political opposition was transferred to the reforming mullahs who were its active supporters. Rumours started spreading in O. that Abdugaffar was a criminal and he had spent some time in prison. It is difficult to say whether this rumour undermined his legitimacy as a representative of the government but many villagers, including some *hajis*, believed it. A meeting was held at the local *jamoat* where the imam was called in for questioning by the collective farm chairman, village police officer, and prominent residents of O. The policeman insisted that the imam had spent time in prison and, according to witnesses, the imam did not deny this. The officials suggested that he leave O. voluntarily under the pretext that the local youth were unhappy with him and were willing to force him out. When explaining their decision to higher governing bodies, the local authorities said that they had been forced to expel Abdugaffar because of fears that the situation could have escalated into an ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Tajiks. Abdugaffar left and Abdumumin-mahsum was reinstated as imam.

Abdugaffar was the only victim of this religious conflict despite the fact that he had a number of supporters in O. The official reason for his expulsion was his alleged criminal past and the possibility of an ethnic conflict, and not his religious beliefs which nobody questioned openly. What made Matchai-mullah vulnerable in this conflict were not his religious beliefs but the fact that he was a stranger who did not have any social ties with the local community. Unlike *hojas*, *ishans* and *turas* who although originally outsiders, were integrated into the local social structure and were considered 'locals', Matchai-mullah remained outside social networks and only maintained religious ties. *Hojas* and *ishans* were easily able to present themselves as either 'Tajik' or 'Uzbek' as the situation demanded. However, despite his knowledge of Uzbek, Abdugaffar was a 'Tajik' in an Uzbek village, which reinforced his image as an 'outsider'.

As an outsider, Abdugaffar did not have any vested interests, ties or responsibilities, in the local community. He was not burdened with local history or a sense of local identity. In the beginning this helped him to win some popularity,

but in the end it resulted in his downfall. The main actors in this were not his religious opponents, the *mahsums*, but the secular authorities, who were concerned by the concentration of symbolic capital in his hands. The growing influence of the imam threatened the established monopoly hold of power in O. held by a few families. Members of these families had, over a period of many years, managed to occupy the most important administrative and economic positions in the village, although they did not possess religious capital. One of these positions was that of chairman of the collective farm who was a very influential person in the local area. He appointed his relatives to important and profitable posts and felt his position to be unassailable. However, Abdugaffar represented a new and independent force, albeit not completely developed, behind which stood the influential and popular political structure of the IRPT which to a significant degree had control over the state apparatus. To local officials it appeared that Abdugaffar was thus in a strong enough position to use his religious position to achieve political results and so destroy the existing configuration of power in the village.

The expulsion of Matchai-mullah and the symbolic victory over the supporters of the IRPT did not put an end to the rivalry between *hajis* and *mahsums*. However, as the day-to-day struggle for survival in the face of the national economic collapse dominated the attention of ordinary villagers, the passions surrounding the religious conflict dissipated, the arguments about rituals became insignificant in the eyes of the local residents, and the mosque became deserted. This did not mean that there was a winner in this conflict. Disagreements and rivalry remain, with the main parties maintaining their positions, and the struggle for control of the religious sphere continued.

These events of 1991–1992 were confusing for many people in O. They could not tell what was ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ Islam, what should be condemned and what welcomed. The case of Karimkul, a former geography teacher in O., presents a typical example of this in that the story of his return to Islam contains a paradoxical mix of the rational and the mystical. Having retired, Karimkul asked a local *mahsum*: ‘I have never performed the *namoz* and have not fasted. If I start doing it now, will I receive the God’s forgiveness?’ The *mahsum* told him that he had to perform the *namoz* as many times as he would have done had he performed it regularly since the age of 12. Karimkul recalls that he swore and left, thinking this was impossible. After Matchai-mullah arrived in O. Karimkul had a dream in which he asked the new mullah the same question and received the answer that ‘even if you read *namoz* once and fast once, you will already be a Muslim and therefore can obtain God’s forgiveness’. The next morning he spoke to Matchai-mullah and he had exactly the same conversation as in his dream. Ever since Karimkul performs the prayers and fasts.

Karimkul, a former Communist activist, became an active supporter of Abdugaffar and Ergash-haji. He visited the main mosque every day for prayers and criticised the *mahsums*. His opponents call him a ‘Wahhabi’ behind his back. He was convinced that he was betraying neither the traditions of the ancestors nor the traditions of Islam. Furthermore, Karimkul is a close relative of the



collective farm chairman and Karimkul's son, who has a high position in collective farm, was responsible for expelling Abdugaffar.

Karimkul's case is quite typical. Villagers in O. often make conflicting and contradictory statements about 'traditions' in Islam, whether they are supporters of one of the rival groups of mullahs or not. Similarly ambiguous remarks were made by my informants about *hajis* and *mahsums*. Most people did not trust them and openly disapproved of both parties. Although, it might be theoretically possible to distinguish between them in terms of particular doctrinal issues, individual villagers were never consistent in their positions. People interpreted their own and other people's arguments depending on the a multiplicity of considerations such as their ideas about who counts as a 'stranger' and who a 'local', the configuration of kinship and social relationships, and relations of economic and political domination

I argue that these various events, factors, relationships and identities cannot be placed within the opposition between 'traditionalists' and 'fundamentalists' that the 'experts' on Islam in Central Asia attempt to construct. Bourdieu argues that 'ignoring the points of uncertainty and ambiguity ... leads to the creation of perfect but unrealistic *artifacts*'.<sup>59</sup> Moderation and aggressiveness, tolerance and dogmatism, local and foreign are terms that are ascribed to this dichotomous model. However, in my opinion they do not characterise *hajis*, *mahsums*, or any group such as the descendents of saints. They are the tools and perceptions which these groups manipulate in the complex game they play out in the religious field, which in turn mediates access to positions of status and influence in the community.

Depending on the type and size of the symbolic capital and other resources which a particular group commands, depending on the distribution and the nature of the legitimacy of these resources, different players use different strategies for strengthening and retaining leadership within the religious sphere. An important resource in this struggle, although not the only one, is an appeal to 'real' Islam, the claim that certain practices or actions are 'Islamic' or 'non-Islamic', and different groups clothe their own interests in these terms. In the process they contribute to the creation and revival of local Muslim identity. Some groups have been more successful in this than others, but as Said writes, 'no one person, authority, or institution has total control over that definition [of Islam], hence, of course, the contest'.<sup>60</sup> Muslims themselves do not exercise this control. Nor do external 'experts' who, in adhering to a model which opposes 'traditionalists' and 'fundamentalists', become hostages to one or the other of the parties in local struggles to interpret Islam. Worse still, they themselves become authors of particular interpretations of Islam and thus, becoming involved in the conflict, take it upon themselves to identify the 'guilty' and the 'innocent'.

## Notes and references

1. This article is based on research carried out with the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.
2. E. Said, 'Afterword' in E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), p 333; E. Said, 'Preface' in E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 2003), pp xv–xxx.

3. D. DeWeese, 'Islam and the legacy of Sovietology: a review essay on Yaacov Ro'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2002, Vol 13, No 3, pp 298–330.
4. *Ibid.*, p 309.
5. For an interesting critique of 'expert' knowledge concerning issues of ethnicity, territory and citizenship see M. Reeves, 'Locating danger: *konfliktologiya* and the search for fixity in the Fergana Valley borderlands', *Central Asian Survey*, 2005, Vol 24, No 1, pp 67–81.
6. For an account of the different political and theological trends in contemporary Central Asian Islam, see A. Muminov, 'Traditsionnye i sovremennye religiozno-teologicheskie shkoly v Tsentralnoi Azii', *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, 1999, Vol 4, No 5, pp 81–83; B. Babadzhanov, 'Islam in Uzbekistan: from the struggle for "religious purity" to political activism', in *Central Asia. A Gathering Storm?*, B. Rumer (ed) (New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp 299–330; B. Babadzhanov, 'Religiozno-oppozitsionnye gruppy v Uzbekistane', in *Religiozniy ekstremizm v Tsentralnoi Azii: Problemy i perspektivy* (Dushanbe, 2002), pp 43–61. However, even in this excellent research a tendency to reduce the complexity of Islamic practice to simplistic oppositions between 'traditionalist' and 'reformist' camps (see the very interesting article by B. Babadzhanov, A. Muminov, M. D. Olcott, 'Muhammadzhan Hindustani (1892–1989) i religioznaya sreda ego epokhi (predvaritelnye razmyshleniya o formirovaniy "sovetskogo islama" v Srednei Azii)', *Vostok*, 2004, Vol 5, pp 43–59).
7. In this article I use terms 'Uzbek' and 'Tajik' without discussing how their meanings have changed through-out history. See S. Abashin, 'Arkheologia sredneaziatskikh natsionalizmov: Les mot et les choses', *Ab Imperio*, 2003, No 1, pp 497–522.
8. P. Bourdieu, 'Genèse et structure du shamp religieux', *Revue française de sociologie*, 1971, XII, pp 295–334 (P. Bourdieu, 'Genesis i struktura polya religii', *P. Bourdieu, Sotsialnoe prostranstvo: polya i praktiki* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteya, 2005), p 23).
9. *Ibid.*, p 19.
10. *Ibid.*, pp 20, 42.
11. For more details on the descendents of the saints see B.G. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001); B. G. Privratsky, "'Turkistan belongs to the Qojas": local knowledge of a Muslim tradition', *Devout Societies vs Impious States? Transmitting Islamic Learning in Russia, Central Asia and China, through the Twentieth Century*, S. A. Dudoignon (ed) (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), pp 161–212.
12. See E. Rezvan, 'Khodzha', *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar* (Moskva, 1991), p 280.
13. See W. Barthold [G.E. Wheeler], 'Ishan', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM Edition, v.1.0 (Koninklijke NV, Leiden, 1999), V.IV, 113a–113b; S. Abashin, 'Ishan', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiskoi imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar*, Vyp. 2 (Moskva, 1999), pp 40–41.
14. See S. Abashin, 'Tura', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiskoi imperii*, Vyp. 2, pp 88–89.
15. *Ishans* had a title *sayyid*, typical for the descendents of the Prophet, but in O. they were only known as *ishans*. On the role of the Prophet's descendents in Muslim society see C. Van Arendonk [W. A. Graham], 'Sharif', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. IX, pp 329b–338a.
16. See H. Algar, 'Nakshband', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. VII, pp 933a–934a; H. Algar, K. A. Nizami, 'Nakshbandiyya', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. VII, pp 934b–938b. Sufi symbols and terminology play an important role in the relationship between the descendents of the saints and the residents of O. Although this relationship can not be called Sufi in the classical, religious meaning of the word, conscious or subconscious appeal to the Sufi tradition allows the descendents of the saints to legitimise their status.
17. Traditionally, paternal descent is considered to be more important than the maternal. However, in the holy lineages maternal descent is just as important and as recognised as descent through the paternal line, especially if it includes important figures. The descendents of the saints manipulate their ancestral names according to the circumstances in a way that brings them the most symbolic and social gain.
18. In Central Asian society etiquette dictates that descendents of saints be treated with respect and special titles are used when addressing them. It is forbidden to curse or harm them in any way, and it is considered good (*halol*) to help them and give offerings etc. Breaking these rules is believed by many to bring misfortune.
19. The acknowledged norm is that male descendents of the saints are permitted to marry a 'commoner', while it is strictly prohibited for females. In reality, of course, these rules are often broken.
20. Some saints in other towns and villages of Central Asia are legitimised by rich 'Islamic' written tradition, which the saint's descendents and followers try to preserve and promote these written sources include including scientific works and publications about saints and holy places. The government also plays a role in legitimising saints by including them in the pantheon of national heroes. Restoration of *mazars*, the public visitation of the shrines by officials, and regular use of the saint names in public speeches increases the popularity of shrines and strengthens the status of the descendents of the saints, as well as their income from offerings.

21. For example, once Muhtarhon-ishan was asked by a couple to perform a marriage prayer (*nikoh*), but, as it turned out, the woman had not received a divorce from her previous husband. This scandalous situation demonstrated a certain lack of legitimacy of *ishans* as mullas which called into question their right to be mullas.
22. About *bu-otin* or *otincha* see H. Fathi, 'Otinets: the unknown women clerics of Central Asian Islam', *Central Asian Survey*, 1997, No. 16(1), pp 27–43; A. Kramer, 'Otin', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiskoi imperii*, Vol 3 (Moskva, 2001, pp 77–79).
23. There is another category of women practising magic and healing called *bahshi*, see B. Spuler, 'Bakhshi', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. I, p 953a; V. Basilov, *Shamanstvo u narodov Srednei Azii* (Moskva, 1992). This is a separate topic, and therefore I will not discuss it in detail. However, it is worth noting that in O. *bahshis* receive a special blessing to practice from Mukarram, Iskanderhon-tura's daughter.
24. In other villages and towns in Central Asia, the 'descendants of the saints' successfully converted their symbolic capital into the social sphere, politics and culture. See S. Abashin, 'Gellner, "potomki svyatykh" i Srednaya Azia: mezhdru islamom i natsionalizmom', *Ab Imperio*, 2004, No. 3, pp 535–562.
25. See E. Geoffroy, 'Shaykh', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. IX, pp 397a–398a.
26. In the past this ritual related to the commencement of agricultural work and was accompanied by prayers for rain. Nowadays, *hudoi* is an annual collective prayer for wellbeing.
27. See J. Calmard, 'Molla', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. VII, pp 221a–225a.
28. See J. Pedersen, 'Masjdjid', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. VI, pp 674b–675b.
29. *Domla, domulla*—teacher (see A. Muminov, 'Damulla', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiskoi imperii*, Vol 2, pp 28–29).
30. The local authorities knew about this prayer house but ignored it.
31. See A. Kramer, 'Bibi Seshanba', *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiskoi imperii*, Vol 4. (Moskva, 2003), p 17; A. Kramer, 'Mushkul Kushod', *Ibid.*, p 56. According to my informants, Abdumutal-mahsum tried to extend his jurisdiction on these traditionally female rituals.
32. On conflicts between *bu-otins* see H. Fathi, *Femmes d'autorité dans l'Asie centrale contemporaine. Quête des ancêtres et reconstitutions identitaires dans l'islam postsoviétique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004). I do not touch upon this topic in my article as I had not witnessed any such conflicts in O. during my fieldwork, but it does not mean they did not exist.
33. See A. S. Tritton, 'Djanaza', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. II, pp 441b–442b.
34. See B. Lewis, A. J. Wensinck [J. Jomier], 'Hadjdj', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, V. III, pp 31b–38b. The title of *haji* can be adopted not only by new mullahs. In one of the neighbouring villages Kori-buva-mahsum took a new name of Haji-buva after his pilgrimage to Mecca.
35. The official mosque in O. opened in 1988. The opening was attended by the representatives of the local government and official mullahs from *oblast* and *raion* centres.
36. A *muazzin* (the local term is *sufi*) is a person who calls Muslims to prayer. These figures, although important, did not play an active role in the religious conflict and, therefore, I do not refer to them in this article.
37. B. Pétric draws attention to this difference in B. M. Petric, *Pouvoir, don et réseaux en Ouzbekistan post-soviétique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p 229.
38. On the 'commercialisation' of rituals and religious activities in 1990s, see V. Koroteyeva, E. Makarova, 'Money and social connections in the Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbek city', *Central Asian Survey*, 1998, Vol 17, No 4, p 593; D. Kandiyoti, N. Azimova, 'The communal and the sacred: women's worlds of ritual in Uzbekistan', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2004, No 10, p 335.
39. Bourdieu, 'Genezis i struktura polya religii', p 44.
40. In the 1920s Sharī'a religious courts were recognised by the Soviet state.
41. Bourdieu, 'Genezis i struktura polya religii', p 43.
42. Central Asian Muslims used all opportunities given by Islamic doctrine tradition to avoid following the scriptural prescriptions. In the case of descendants of the saints, since they are believed to embody Islam they are able occasionally to breach formal requirements.
43. Despite being prohibited by law, polygamy was practised in Central Asia during the whole of the Soviet period. It usually happened when the first wife could not have children. Local authorities routinely turned a blind eye to this.
44. P. Bourdieu, 'La production de la croyance. Contribution à l'économie des biens symboliques', *Actes de la recherché en sciences sociales*, 1977, No 13, pp 3–43 (the quote is taken from the Russian edition, see P. Bourdieu, 'Proizvodstvo very: Vklad v ekonomiku simvolicheskikh blag', P. Bourdieu, *Sotsialnoe prostanstvo*, p 195).
45. Argument about the Islamic nature of rituals is a common means through which competing groups assert their positions. For centuries rivalry in Central Asia between different sections of the ulama (the religiously educated elite among Muslim), political parties and Sufi brotherhoods was expressed in this way. See

- B. Babadzhanov, 'Zikr *dzhahr* i *sama*': sakralizatsia profannogo ili profanatsia sakralnogo?', *Podvizhniki islama: Kult svyatykh i sufizm v Srednei Azii i na Kavkaze* (Moskva, 2003), pp 237–252.
46. Close relatives of the deceased, who greet the guests, do not eat any food cooked in the house of the deceased during the funeral meal. They eat at neighbours' houses or only eat food brought by the guests.
  47. Funeral meals are also held during the first *hayit* (Muslim religious festival, such as *qurbon* or *ruza*) after the funeral.
  48. This was supported by the government as well as the official Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. See S. Abashin, 'Vopreki "zdravomu smyslu"?' (K voprosu o "ratsionalnosti/irratsionalnosti" ritualnykh rashodov v Srednei Azii', *Vestnik Evrazii*, 1999, No 1–2 (6–7), pp 92–112; B. Babadzhanov, 'O fetvakh SADUM protiv "neislamskikh obychaev"', *Islam na postsovetskom prostranstve: vzglyad iznutri* (Moskva, 2001), pp 175–176. Similar stances taken by official religious figures during the Soviet period often had a 'fundamentalist' character. See B. Babadzhanov, 'O fetvakh SADUM protiv "neislamskikh obychaev"', p 180.
  49. It should be noted that some, not the most influential, *mahsums* and descendents of the saints became supporters of the *hajis*.
  50. *Hajis* used literature and videos with the speeches distributed by these preachers. These materials had a hypnotic effect on the residents of O. who were used to trusting the printed word and 'cinema'. It supported the special status of *hajis* as the bearers of new knowledge of Islam.
  51. A lot has been written about the 'Wahhabi' groups in Namangan, which later transformed into the opposition Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and carried out armed anti-government activities during 1999 and 2000. See A. Abduvahitov, 'Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan', *Russia's Muslim Frontier*, D. F. Eickelman (ed) (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp 79–100. The members of this group did not call themselves 'Wahhabi', but this name became a popular label for the 'foreign' ideas that they promoted.
  52. It is interesting to note that a secondary school teacher from the family of *ishans* (on his mother's side he is related to *hajis*), used host visitors from Namangan in his home. This fact could be interpreted as an attempt by some of the descendents of the saints to sideline *mahsums* in their struggle for dominance in the religious field. However, this was probably a one-off instance because later on, during the open clash between *hajis* and *mahsums*, the teacher did not get involved into the conflict. I do not know whether the new mullahs voiced their opinions on the magical practices of the descendents of the saints. It is likely that they disapproved of the practice of visiting *mazars* as a practice inconsistent with 'real' Islam but they never took any action to stop the practice.
  53. I witnessed this happening in other villages of the Ferghana valley during my fieldwork in 1989–1991. Of course, I did not manage to speak to any of the Namangan mullahs, who avoided any unnecessary contact with people, but I remember the bewilderment on people's faces after their preaching.
  54. For the chronology of events in Tajikistan at the beginning of 1990s see B. Bushkov, D. Mikul'skiy, "*Tadzhikskaya revoliutsia*" i *grazhdanskaya voina, 1989–1994* (Moskva, 1995); B. Bushkov, D. Mikul'skiy, *Anatomia grazhdanskoi voiny v Tadzhikistane: Etno-sotsialnye protsessy i politicheskaya borba, 1992–1996* (Moskva, 1997).
  55. Novo-Matchinskii rayon was founded in the 1950s. Tajiks from the mountainous areas of Matcha settled here.
  56. There were many descendents of the saints among the followers of the Islamic Renaissance Party.
  57. During that period many religious figures adopted more radical views. In the late Soviet period the *Kazi Kalon*, the leader of the official Islamic administration in Tajikistan (*Kaziyat*), was Akbar Kahharov, also known as Turajon-zoda (he was from a family of *ishans* and *turas*). He was loyal to the state authorities and considered moderate in his religious views. However, even he called for more radical religious reform in 1991–1992 and for increasing the role of Islam in Tadjikistan. His views brought him close to the Islamic Renaissance Party. During the civil war Turajon-zoda immigrated to Iran. In 1997, after the peace agreement, he became the first Vice Prime Minister of Tajikistan, and in 2005 he resigned. See S. Gretskey, 'Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda', *Central Asia Monitor*, 1994, No 1, pp 16–24.
  58. It is well known, that the Islamic Renaissance Party had a very strong support from Novaya Matchai.
  59. P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Les Édition de Minuit, 1980) (quoted from the Russian edition P. Bourdieu, *Prakticheskii smysl* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteya, 2001), p 165).
  60. E. Said, 'Afterword' in E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), p 333.