INTRODUCTION

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Towards an Anthropology of Moral Reasoning

On 13 May 2005, government security forces massacred hundreds of protesters in the city of Andijan, in Uzbekistan's portion of the Fergana Valley. Accounts are contested, and reliable facts are hard to come by, given the Uzbekistan government's efforts to restrict the flow of information. International human rights and crisis monitoring groups claimed that as many as 750 people were killed, the vast majority of whom were unarmed civilians protesting the economic hardship caused by corruption, government repression, restrictive government regulations on trade, and the arbitrary arrest of individuals on charges of religious extremism.[1] The government, for its part, claims that the demonstrators were armed Islamist extremists and terrorists who had forced civilians into the square as human shields, and that fewer than 200 were killed, most of whom were the gunmen themselves or security service personnel (Human Rights Watch 2005; Kendzior 2007; Khalid 2007, 192; Megoran 2008). The protests were sparked by the trial of a group of local businessmen on charges of religious extremism and involvement in a banned Islamic group named as 'Akromiya' by the state prosecutors. The trial itself attracted large demonstrations by the relatives and supporters of the accused, who protested their innocence and criticised the unfairness of the criminal justice process.[2] At the conclusion of the trial, a group of armed men stormed the prison in Andijan in which the businessmen were being held and freed them, along with hundreds of other prisoners,

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many of whom were also convicted on charges of religious extremism. The gunmen then took control of the buildings of the local government administration, and a large demonstration of civilians, reportedly numbering in the thousands, assembled in the square outside. The protest was ended when government forces opened fire on the crowd.

The concerns of this book address issues at the heart of this tragic event. They deal with how individuals fashion themselves as Muslim when the government attempts to maintain tight control over religious expression, routinely employing the coercive resources of the state to this end. During the closing years of the Soviet Union, when the reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev allowed for greater religious freedoms, many Muslims in Uzbekistan, as in the other Central Asian republics, began to explore openly the question of what it means to be a Muslim. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the successor government in Uzbekistan incorporated Islam within its ideology of national independence developed to replace Marxist-Leninism as the legitimating and guiding ideology of the newly independent state. The scope for public religious expression was further expanded, and there was an explosion of interest in Islam. Thousands of mosques were restored or built, and Muslim rituals that had been curtailed during the years of Soviet rule were held openly. For a brief few years just before and after independence in 1991, Muslims throughout Uzbekistan explored and debated the nature of Islam in relative freedom, as theological ideas that had been prevented from being circulated widely within the Soviet Union became available. However, as the government of President Karimov began to view Islam as a potential source of political opposition, restrictions were quickly imposed. Islamic groups independent of the quasi-state Muslim Board of Uzbekistan were banned, and religious expression outside the bounds of what the government considers legitimate began to be ruthlessly suppressed.

This book explores the creativity of moral reasoning as individuals develop understandings of what it means to be a Muslim. Moral

reasoning is not just confined to cognitive reflection upon objective values or a conscious striving to develop a virtuous self. It is inherent within experience itself, in an embodied, ongoing engagement in a social and material world. What is distinctive about these processes in Uzbekistan is the constraint on open debate and public expressions of piety. Anthropologists writing about Muslim societies have often described the debates and struggles about the interpretation of sacred texts, the production and transmission of religious knowledge, how different actors accord legitimacy to their positions, and the role of education, literacy, and transnational movement in this process (Abu-Lughod 1993; Bowen 1993a; Eickelman 1992; Gardner 1999; Horvatich 1994; Reeves 1995). Magnus Marsden has written about the importance of debate itself in notions of being Muslim and living a good life more generally in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Marsden 2005, 85–121; 2009).

In Uzbekistan, however, the ruthlessly repressive efforts of the post-independence government to suppress any expression of Islam independent of what it considers legitimate severely restricts the space for open discussion and debate. The government of President Karimov has functionalised the concepts of tradition and cultural authenticity as tools of governance. It constructs legitimate Islam as part of a unique Central Asian cultural and spiritual heritage. State discourse establishes an opposition between an idealised national tradition and an alien, politically motivated religious extremism as the dominant criterion by which citizens must present their practice as Muslims in situations where the coercive organs of the state can be brought to bear. Where open and free debate is effectively stifled, lived experience has become a privileged site for moral reasoning. This book examines the moral quality of experience and the creativity of experiential reasoning. It examines the intelligibility of experience that enables productive communication and interaction among individuals with diverse understandings of moral selfhood.

The businessmen whose trial sparked the protest referred to above are likely to have been involved in nonpolitical charitable activity. They

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are described in the accounts of a number of academics and human rights organisations as a group of entrepreneurs who had established a mutually supportive network of commercial concerns and who conducted their affairs on the basis of Islamic principles, as they understood them. They are said to have donated a proportion of their income for charitable purposes, paying wages in excess of the government-stipulated minimum, and providing social welfare and health-care support for their employees (Human Rights Watch 2005; Ilkhamov 2006; Rotar 2006). The state prosecutor accused them of belonging to an extremist group called 'Akromiya', which has the ultimate aim of replacing the current government with an Islamic state. This organisation is linked to an individual named Akrom Yuldashev, who laid out his philosophy in a pamphlet titled *imonga yo'l* (Road to Faith). However, the text of this pamphlet contains no reference to the establishment of an Islamic state,[3] and Sarah Kendzior has convincingly argued that 'Akromiya' as an organisation is an invention of the government of Uzbekistan as part of its project to suppress expressions of Islam independent of its control (Kendzior 2006).

Like many in Uzbekistan since the end of communist rule, these businessmen seem to have been striving towards an understanding of what it means to be a Muslim and to live in a moral community. The same is true of many individuals I came to know in the course of my own research. One of these was also an entrepreneur in the city of Andijan, whom I met in 2000. Yusuf-aka was in his late thirties at the time and had worked as an irrigation engineer until the collapse of the Soviet Union, after which he became an entrepreneur. He had learnt shoemaking while still at school, and in 1992, soon after independence, he bought ex-factory machinery in a second-hand goods market in Tashkent, hired some workers, and went into business. The capital for this venture came from a cousin who took two-thirds of the profits for three years, until the capital had been paid off, after which they shared profits equally. At the time I knew him, Yusuf-aka was involved in a number of barter deals with factories in

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Uzbekistan and Russia, exchanging agricultural produce and spare parts for raw materials for his own production enterprises. Like the businessmen who were put on trial, Yusuf-aka was a devout Muslim. He prayed five times a day, did not drink alcohol, and preferred business partners to invest in his ventures for a share of the profits rather than to lend him money for interest, which is contrary to Islamic norms, although he did on occasion approach banks for loans. He viewed his relationship with his cousin as a moral one, not just a business partnership. They shared equally in the profits of all their business ventures, whether they took part jointly or not, and met once a year during Ramadan to settle accounts. Not only did Yusuf-aka's relationship with his cousin help him to avoid the un-Islamic practice of borrowing for interest, but it was also an effective strategy for coping with the uncertainties associated with business in Uzbekistan. The mutual assistance network set up by the businessmen accused of religious extremism is likely to have performed a similar function.

In the course of my research, it became clear that despite the government's attempts, frequently using brutal means,[4] to shape religious expression in line with its own constructions, individuals in Uzbekistan, like Yusuf-aka and the Andijan businessmen, are developing their own understandings of what it means to be a Muslim. In one of my research sites, the village of Pakhtabad near Andijan city in the Fergana Valley, men who regularly attended the mosque fashion themselves as Muslim with reference to the Hanafi orthodoxy preached by the imam. When they fall ill, many seek treatment from healers who work with the help of spirits, a practice that is condemned by the imam as contrary to the *sharī'a* (Ar. guide for conduct derived from the Qur'an and practice of the Prophet). Many also have had their own direct encounters with spirit agents in dreams or waking visions. Through their embodied experience of illness and healing and their interactions with fellow villagers at the mosque and outside, these villagers are developing their own particular understandings of what it means to be a Muslim.

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In recent years, anthropologists working in Muslim societies have increasingly been turning their attention to the formation of subjectivities. If an early question for the subfield of the anthropology of Islam was how to encompass the diversity in the local practice of Muslims within a global object of analysis (Eickelman 1982; el-Zein 1977; Geertz 1968; Gellner 1981; Manger 1999), more recent studies have taken individual experience as their starting point. Questions of power and hegemony, disputes about correct interpretation and practice, and explorations of what it means to be a Muslim have been addressed, for example, through the subjective experience of spirit possession (Masquelier 2001; McIntosh 2004) or in decisions by women to adopt particular forms of head covering (Brenner 1996; Werbner 2005). Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind have described how individual Muslims cultivate pious selves with appropriate desires, dispositions, and emotions through self-conscious work upon the self (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005), and Gregory Simon has explored the performance of daily prayer as a context in which Indonesian Muslims engage with multiple and contradictory conceptions of moral selfhood (Simon 2009). Writing about post-Soviet Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Maria Louw has described how understandings of Islam emerge from an individual's subjective experience and practical engagement within a lifeworld. She explores the efforts of individuals to reestablish a moral grounding through direct engagement with Muslim 'saints' and sacred space when they find themselves dislocated and alienated as a result of the economic and social upheavals following the end of communist rule (Louw 2007). When anthropologists do address the idea of Islam in global terms, they often ground it in individual experience. Heiko Henkel has written about the subjective experience of the ritual of daily prayer as a practice that unites Muslims from diverse cultural and interpretive settings in a shared Islamic tradition (Henkel 2005).

This book similarly focuses upon subjective experience and moral selfhood. It moves the discussion forward by addressing directly what we mean by the moral quality of experience. Moral reasoning is not only a

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cognitive process of the mind, a public debate and personal deliberation about objectified values and positions. It is also carried out within an individual's embodied experience. Individuals do not only deliberate over the nature of what it means to be a good Muslim, but they are also continually living out a developing moral self. They are engaged within a field of social relations in which the various discourses and interpretations of Islam circulate. They are immersed within a social and material environment that includes interaction with spirit agents. They suffer illness and healing, and success or failure in projects they hold dear. Individual understandings of Islam are diverse and continually evolving. For many, fulfilling the tenets of Islam as laid down in the Qur'an and Sunna (the exemplary practice of the Prophet Muhammad), visiting the shrines of saints, and fulfilling obligations within their local communities to hold life-cycle rituals in a particular way all contribute to the formation of Muslim selves.

The Usefulness of a Moral Perspective

For Muslims in Uzbekistan, the question of what it means to be a Muslim is in essence a moral one, but what do we mean by 'moral', and how can morality or moral reasoning be studied ethnographically? In Durkheim's conception of society, anything that raises the individual above his or her egoistic concerns and binds a mass of disparate individuals into a unitary society is moral (Durkheim 1964, 1973). Thus, at the extreme, morality is coextensive with the social, so that it might be argued that concern for the moral is diffused throughout the entire project of anthropology. Anthropologists are frequently interested in what might seem explicitly moral questions, such as how individuals in different societies think about the nature of the world around them and the place of humans within it, the relation between human and non-human entities, or how local systems of value respond when they are incorporated within networks of global capitalism. Rather than adopting morality itself as an analytical

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frame, anthropologists have usually found it more productive to explore these issues through a study of more seemingly concrete concepts and phenomena that can be compared cross-culturally. These have included the differing notions of the person, the phenomena of witchcraft and sorcery, or even the concept of evil (Parkin 1985).

From time to time, some anthropologists have made the attempt to delineate morality itself as a distinct field for study. An early attempt was made by Abraham and May Edel, who adopted the Durkheimian conception of morality as a social phenomenon. Reflecting the dominant trends in theory at the time (the 1950s and 1960s), they viewed morality, or ethics, as they called it, as a social institution embedded in a social structure and performing distinct functions. The field of ethics, in their view, would encompass the rules and norms aimed at instilling particular character traits, goals and ideals, the categories of what constitutes a moral community and a responsible person, and the mechanisms for regulating norms (Edel 1962; Edel & Edel 2000).

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in developing a distinctly anthropological approach to morality (Heintz 2009; Zigon 2008). Rather than seeking to identify bounded and coherent systems, more recent work has emphasised process and practice, selfhood and subjectivity, and experience. Signe Howell has suggested that the anthropology of morality should consider the dynamic relation between transcendent values and lived practice. Attention would be directed at the effects of relations of power in constituting and regulating moral ideals and practices, processes of moral reasoning, and the multiple, often conflicting moralities that coexist within a single society (Howell 1997). Michael Lambek has drawn inspiration from Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to address the connection between transcendence and lived practice. Aristotle developed an idea of virtue that is not tied to abstract principles alone, but that also incorporates action in relation to contingent circumstance aimed at the good. Virtue is a state of the

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person rather than a collection of rules. A virtuous person is one who has attained mastery over the self through discipline and training, so that he or she is no longer driven by the demands of bodily senses but has developed the will, the disposition, to act in pursuit of the good. The practically wise person, therefore, is not concerned with a purely intellectual contemplation of virtue but exercises choice within the ongoing and contingent flow of circumstance in the lived world, informed by dispositions that are trained and cultivated (Aristotle 1998). Lambek has drawn on these ideas to locate moral practice in 'situated judgement'. The virtuous subject is a 'virtuoso' who makes practical interventions within the contingent flow of events in terms of shared symbols, myths, and local histories that transcend them (Lambek 2002).

Lambek's approach identifies the self as the location for morality, or at least for the anthropological study of moral reasoning. Morality is a state of the person and exercised in the flow of life. Others have similarly located morality in the self but focus on processes of self-fashioning. James Laidlaw (2002) and James Faubion (2001) have separately built upon Foucault's work on power and subjectivity to locate an anthropology of ethics, following Foucault's use of the term, in a study of the freedom that individuals are able to exercise in fashioning themselves as ethical subjects. For Foucault, morality refers to prescriptive rules and codes for living, whereas ethics encompasses the operations individuals perform upon themselves, the disciplines and technologies of the self that produce a desired state of being (Foucault 1985, 1994a, 1994c).

Wherever and in so far as people's conduct is shaped by attempts to make of themselves a certain kind of person, because it is as such a person that, on reflection, they think they ought to live, to that extent their conduct is ethical and free. And to the extent that they do so with reference to ideals, values, models, practices, relationships, and institutions that are amenable to ethnographic study, to that extent their conduct becomes the subject matter for an anthropology of ethics. (Laidlaw 2002, 327)

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Saba Mahmood's study of women's piety movements in Cairo is an example of this understanding of morality applied in a Muslim context (Mahmood 2005).

Both Laidlaw and Faubion locate ethics in the freedom for reflection, and individuals are free to the extent that they are not utterly subjugated within relations of power. Their choice of the term 'ethics' over 'morality' is intended to foreground the intentional work of self-fashioning over an unreflexive immersion within a preexisting social field. This constructs the moral as essentially a self-conscious activity, even if it is located within a social and cultural context and has the effect of producing embodied dispositions. However, creativity and moral reasoning need not be confined to this sort of self-conscious, cognitive reflection. It is also inherent in an individual's ongoing, embodied experience.

Arthur Kleinman has located morality in just such everyday experience. It is present in the intersubjective relations of kinship and neighbourhood, in religious practices and experiences of illness and healing, and in the entire spectrum of experience and interaction in daily life. This is moral, Kleinman argues, because it involves contestations and compromises through which values are negotiated and reworked (Kleinman 1999). Kleinman's concern is to develop a way to think about standards and values that have universal, translocal relevance, which he defines as ethical, in the context of particular local settings.

Joel Robbins similarly locates morality in experience, but provides a cultural understanding. He takes inspiration from Dumont and Weber to place 'value' at the centre of our understanding of culture, and focuses his attention on situations of culture change. In his ethnographic context, this is conversion to Pentecostal Christianity in a Papua New Guinea society. Morality is located in the everyday living out of the conflicting value systems present in a society, and it is this conflict that provides the space for self-conscious ethical reasoning of the sort that Laidlaw and Faubion have described (Robbins 2004, 2007).