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Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan (Anthropology, Culture and Society)

Colette Harris

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Control and Subversion makes an important contribution to the study of Muslim societies in general, while also being a unique study of a neglected area - post-Soviet Tajikistan - a country gaining increasing importance in the international arena of Central Asia. The book presents an intimate view of this society, told through ethnographically collected life histories, unusually including men's as well as women's. Despite developing significant gender theories (notably reframing work of Judith Butler), and maintaining high academic standards, it remains as readable as a popular novel. Control and Subversion investigates the relationship of gender to the inner workings of social control, such as exposing ways in which Tajik society threatens men's masculinity, thereby bringing them to force family members into conformity, irrespective of the suffering this may cause. It examines how masculine and feminine gender characteristics influence personal relationships and explores gender relations at their most intimate - from the secret musings of adolescent girls, through the painful experiences of young men, to the trauma of sexual initiation. Although largely concentrating on contemporary life, the book also discusses historical materials and Soviet influence on Tajik society. Control and Subversion is essential reading for anyone interested in Central Asia, Muslim societies, the lives of Muslim women, or gender in a Muslim context.

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