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**Social and cultural anthropology**  
**Standard level**  
**Paper 1**

9 November 2023

**Zone A** afternoon | **Zone B** afternoon | **Zone C** afternoon

1 hour 30 minutes

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**Instructions to candidates**

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage and answer questions 1 and 2. Choose either question 3 or 4. Answer question 5.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[30 marks]**.

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Thibault, H. 2021. “Are You Married?": Gender and Faith in Political Ethnographic Research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 50(3).

I conducted fieldwork in northern Tajikistan in 2010 and 2011. I was interested in the post-Soviet religious revival following the country’s independence in 1991 and the impact of the Soviet legacy on the place of religion in Tajik society and on conservative Muslims. I used participant observation and formal interviews with ordinary citizens, believers, nonbelievers and clerics.

5 I witnessed everyday violence that occurs outside formal institutions. On two occasions, Iskandar, a conservative Muslim whom I knew well, got into trouble with the police. The first time, his wife Mera called me because Iskandar was being detained by the police for allegedly performing the *nikoh*, a religious marriage that fulfils Islamic obligations but is not recognized officially. After being questioned for hours and “beaten with words,” they released him without charges. Iskandar was  
10 not overly upset because he was used to police harassment. The second incident was in my apartment. I was hosting them for dinner when a policeman visited for the routine check of my papers. He was shocked to see me with them because of our conservative appearance. Mera wore a *hijab* [Islamic head scarf] and a long robe, and Iskandar had a long bushy beard. I usually dressed more conservatively when I met them, with a modest dress and a scarf that covered  
15 my hair. The policeman asked for their papers too and an argument broke out because Iskandar had written something in Arabic in his passport. The conversation was tense but brief and the policeman left, still confused about the presence of such friends. After he left, we joked about how in Tajikistan the police are associated with trouble, not safety.

20 The policeman’s reaction highlighted the tensions between state and religion in Tajikistan. He was shocked that a foreigner like me was hanging around conservative Muslims like them. “How could I possibly be friends with such ‘fanatics?’” he asked me later, expressing a distrust of religious people. He was also upset that Iskandar had desecrated [disrespected] his passport with religious scripture, violating the secular character of the national identity.

25 In fieldwork terms, as a single foreign female in my thirties, it was easy to make contacts and get access to men and women, even within conservative circles. I was treated as an “honorary male”, making social conventions inapplicable toward me. However, I was also seen as a “gendered, embodied, sexualized and emotional being”, and in Tajikistan it was unusual for a woman my age to be unmarried. Furthermore, divorce and polygyny\* were common, and being single facilitated interaction with men since they perceived me as “available” and as a potential partner.

30 One time I met Iskandar at the bazaar, and he proposed that I get married to his friend I had met a few days before. I was used to hiding my reaction to such remarks but this time my shock was obvious. “How can I possibly marry someone I have met only once?” I cried. He paused and then asked: “Is this really uncivilized for you?” I explained that in my culture, people do not normally marry someone they barely know. Iskandar’s persistent attempts to get me married were a way to  
35 remedy my “unfortunate” celibacy, and also showed that he did not see cultural differences as an obstacle to marriage. He considered me as subject to the local habitus; he expected me to conform to local norms. Arranged marriages are the norm in Tajikistan and many young couples do not know each other well before the wedding.

- 40 This and similar anecdotes reveal something about the practice and conception of religion and its  
priority over other identity markers. For strict Muslims, ethnicity was a social construct that did not  
matter. For example, when I mentioned to them that I should learn Tajik, they replied that Russian  
was enough for me to do research in Central Asia and that I should learn Arabic instead, “the  
language of the Prophet”. On the other hand, religion was something far more significant for the  
establishment of interpersonal relations and the fact that I was not Muslim did not seem to matter  
45 because they *assumed* that I would convert to Islam.

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\* polygyny: marriage in which two or more women share a husband

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **cultural relativism** and describe how it can be understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Explain how the key concept of **power** helps you understand the ethnographic data presented in the passage. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the way in which the key concept of **social relations** or **identity** is evident in this passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. [10]

**OR**

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage with the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts and ethnographic material in your answer. [10]

Answer question 5.

5. To what extent is knowing others possible? Discuss with reference to **at least two** sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage. [10]
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**References:**

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