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Some Responses to Globalisation in Uzbekistan : State Authoritarianism, Migrant Labour and Neo-traditionalism

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This article will deal with some aspects of Uzbek society's responses to globalisation. It is based on fieldwork conducted in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, and in the countryside, in 2004 and 2005. Tashkent has approximately 3 million inhabitants whereas the country's population reached an estimated 26 million in 2005. My research focused on several work-sites, working conditions, social relations in the sphere of production, and their relationship to other social spheres. I consider indeed the domain of work as a key entry point to understanding the most important evolutions of social relations in their totality (in the sense given by Mauss to this word), which should be particularly true in the peripheral republics of the ex-USSR. The collapse of the Union in 1991 meant not only a political 'partition' but also the dismantling of an integrated economic system and had immediate dramatic consequences on the economic conditions of life for the whole population.

These fieldwork investigations prolong and fuel theoretical reflections and comparative studies that I have conducted on globalisation during the last ten years. The first part of this article will thus be devoted to clarifying the term globalisation itself, and the way anthropology may grasp the processes involved through its specific methods and modes of knowledge production. This preliminary is necessary. During at least the past 20 years, the term globalisation has been popularised and has become a very common word which is now omnipresent in a very large range of discourses all around the world. From its origins in the arcane worlds of corporate management and the World Bank, it has found a way to an impressive 'success'. Its diffusion into everyday language, as well as into scientific idioms, mass media debates or political rhetoric and also into various manifestations of political contestation has made the term 'globalisation' a central expression of the major issues in contemporary societies across the world. For this very reason, though, the term is highly polysemic, and subject to various forms of mythification: it has become a kind of contemporary fetish.

Within the scientific domain itself, there exists a very large range of conceptions of globalisation. Each discipline tends to elaborate its own, while in each disciplinary field numerous polemics divide the specialists. Scholars' attitudes towards globalisation also diverge from those who feel enthusiastic or depressed by the radical novelty of a globalised world, from those who assume that globalisation does not exist or those for whom nothing is new because globalisation has existed in various forms since time immemorial. I will not quote or discuss here all these different views. Nevertheless, one must understand that the differences in approaches are not innocent. They manifest in a very significant way divergences in attempts to make sense of changes in the contemporary world and, more importantly, to rank these in a hierarchy of importance. In this article, I will just suggest a few phenomena that I consider to be the main features that should be taken into account if we are to understand the whole set of hierarchised phenomena that constitutes globalisation. While most anthropologists elaborate a cultural understanding of globalisation, claiming that this particular angle of analysis forms the specificity of their discipline[2], and its (supposed) value on the market of the social sciences, I will assume on the contrary that the economy — I would say the political economy — happens to be hegemonic worldwide. There is no need to be particularly marxist to defend such a position, nor is it an economic determinism: one can find some evidence of it in daily newspapers, and — more academically — some theoretical arguments in Polanyi's work or the publications of the anthropologists whom he influenced (Dumont, Sahlins, Godelier, etc.).

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Paradoxically enough, I will assume that in Uzbekistan there is no dominance of the economy. Indeed, the structure of social relations is marked by the brutal tyranny of the postsoviet regime. This is only an apparent paradox. As a second step, I will thus develop briefly certain aspects of the evolution of Uzbekistan (and the other states of Central Asia) since its independence in 1991. I will try to identify Uzbekistan's position within the processes of globalisation: its alleged 'gradual transition' to a market economy turns into a gradual marginalisation in the world economy and the world market, as well as isolation on the international scene. Then, it is necessary to understand why, despite these characteristics, Uzbekistan's trajectory can be seen as a symptomatic example of globalisation processes.

These preliminary considerations will lead to the exposition of some results of my research, on a more microsocial level.

A glimpse at globalisation

I would claim that globalisation is the transformation of the system of international relations from an economic, political and ideological point of view (see Bazin, 2003). Three phenomena appeared by the end of the 1970s —say after the 1974 oil crisis — and progressively modified deeply the structure of international relations. They affected of course also the structure of social relations inside each national or local context. By stating this, I do not mean that social relations in any localised area are determined by the relationships that are established on the international level. Yet the latter definitely have crucial consequences, and local social dynamics cannot be understood if one does not analyse: 1) the transformation of both the economy and state authority, their ideological justifications and the way this dynamic politico-economic arrangement interacts with its international environment; 2) how local actors perceive, consider and experience these changes — at a global as well as national scale — and their consequences on their own lives; 3) how they react to these changes in their universe.

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[2] Even A. Ong (1999), who argues that globalisation is defined by the major shifts in political economy finds it necessary to state that 'as an anthropologist' her function is to decipher the 'cultural dimension' or 'cultural logics' that support globalisation processes. There is, of course, no 'cultural dimension' that could be separated from 'political' or 'economic' aspects. For a critical review of the uses of 'culture' in North American, British and French anthropologies, see Kuper (1999).

The first phenomenon that can be considered decisive for the setting up of globalisation processes, and which is indeed closely connected to the meaning of the word itself, is the decline of the communist world and its conversion to the so-called market economy. This put an end to the Cold War and the partition of the world into two contending blocks. It began with China's shift to 'market socialism' in 1977, followed by Vietnam and Laos in 1986. The weakening of the communist system was completed, of course, with the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the USSR in 1991. The disappearance of the socialist political, economic and ideological system allowed a worldwide extension of the capitalist politico-economic system. In France, the term *mondialisation* (globalisation) expresses this idea of a worldwide extension of a 'unified' market.

The unified market is, of course, a fiction: numerous publications by economists have denounced it as a fantasy or an illusion. And yet, there are more and more international institutions created or re-enforced to make this fiction concrete. They tend to give reality to market ideals, and have the objective of institutionalising the market in every country, not only in the domain of the economy, but also in every social sphere. This is the second phenomenon that I consider central to the process of globalisation. In the 1980s structural adjustment plans were elaborated and implemented in Africa and Latin America. They marked in a certain way the beginning of hegemony of the international organisations. During the next 20 years, international organisations and international treaties were elaborated or their influence strengthened and extended. Their specific objective, their *raison d'être,* is to consolidate, extend and institutionalise the market economy to the whole world and all social spheres.

The disappearance of the communist politico-economic system and the worldwide extension of capitalism on the one hand; the re-structurating of the whole world through market relations on the other hand: these are, then, the two main pillars of globalisation. To this, one should add the internal transformation of the capitalist system itself. Since the 1970s, the liberalisation of financial transactions and their growing importance in the functioning of the world economy characterises the financiarisation of capitalism. The supremacy of finance capital progresses in parallel to the vanishing of the working class as a historical and political actor, whose reality was made possible by the dominance of marxist ideologies and the existence of the USSR. It gives way to a worldwide regression and de-protection of salaried work that takes various forms and rhythms in different national contexts. Indeed, the paradigm of 'fluidity' and 'liquidity'— which characterises the very logic of finance, in opposition to the logic of industrial capital, that has to be immobilized to become productive — is being applied to the labour factor itself with a increasing pressure since the 1980s (Lordon, 2001).

Since this very decade, at an international level, economic, political and ideological relations, have been restructured on the basis of the extension to the whole world of a market economy dominated by the power of finance, to a certain extent in the vacuum created by the weakening and the disappearance of the communist system. In parallel with the strengthening of the USA as the unchallenged economic and military power, both the decline of the communist block and the growing hegemony of international organisations and treaties restructured the relations of dependency and interdependency at an international level: dependence through external debt and the influence of international organisations in most countries; dependence through interdependence and mutual obligations for dominant states tied to international treaties (i.e. European Union); exclusion, isolation in the international relations system and economic strangulation for a few other states. Thus, one can assert that the main aspect of globalisation is the predominance of market — as an ideal model, an institution, a mode of exchange, and of course practices of competition — and of processes of commodification. In each national context these changes at a global scale combine their effect with internal socio-historic dynamics: they influence internal political relations and in general the processes of hierarchy making: the attribution of social statuses, income generation and (re)distribution, etc. In that regard, they also induce changes in all forms of sociability, including, for instance, gender relations and kinship.

This approach to globalisation is quite different from the conceptions commonly accepted in anthropology, that stress the cultural or symbolic aspects of the processes as if they could be taken into account separately from social, political, ideological, economic aspects. All these 'aspects' or 'dimensions' are closely intertwined — they are indeed just one way to consider phenomena — and thus they have to be considered together. It seems inadequate to emphasize — as does Appadurai (1996), for instance —the circulation of ideas, symbols, images and imaginations or even persons (migration), commodities, capitals and funds, unless one considers that all these flows, the acceleration of which undoubtedly characterises globalisation (see also Hannerz, 1997), are not equivalent. Furthermore, their traffic is structured along the lines of worldwide — but also nationwide and local — relations of domination. They appear to be the expression of the new global political economy. Emphasizing relations of domination might sound bizarre to many anthropologists accustomed to more elegant and softer discourses on culture. Yet, wealth as well as power and — of course — symbolic legitimacy are actually being concentrated more and more at the world scale, leading to such a huge imbalance; the like of which has never previously been witnessed, even during the colonial period.

The consequences of these global processes for anthropologists' methods and conceptions, then, are not merely a question of 'multisite' investigation — to evoke an oft-quoted notion that has become something of a fetish — but rather and more simply of how they question the reality they are observing, how they analyse it, how they understand social change, and how they link together the various phenomena that occur at the local, micro-level of their fieldsite, and at a regional, national and international level (Bazin & Selim, 2006). The question is how they describe and analyse the ways the actors in the fieldsites make sense out of, and respond to, all the changes that occur in their universe, which cannot be considered only as a 'local' universe but always as a 'global' one[3].

The sphere of work appears to be a critical one, especially because in every society of the world globalisation means the obliteration or weakening of the labour relations system that was institutionalised in the previous period. Indeed, the stabilisation of labour and the making of working classes dominated the decades 1920-70[4]. With privatisation and the destruction of state-based industrial compounds

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[3] This precision may sound tautologic — and indeed it is — but it might be worthwhile as it has recently become very common to oppose the 'local' and the 'global'.

[4] The European specialists of the sociology of work often imagine that these processes concern only the so-called 'developed' world. This is untrue of course. To give an illustration, in the British colonial Empire the dockers of Mombasa (Kenya) obtained a stabilisation of their working conditions before their British counterparts, who lost this as early as the 1980s, under Thatcher's assaults. For an

— in the socialist world, developing countries but also Western Europe, and even in the present-day rapidly industrialising and still communist China — the flexibility of work and the de-stabilisation of working classes is one of the main characteristics of the period that begins in the 1980s. Indeed, globalisation means the end of a period dominated by the ideals of development and the modernisation of society (mainly through the development of production and the economy) as J. Ferguson (1999) has established, for instance, in relation to Southern Africa. Replacing these ideals one can observe the dominance exerted by neoliberal ideology, the institution of the market and new forms of state legitimacy building that are connected to these ideologies and also to new patterns of the international relations of domination.

Uzbekistan: the exemplary nature of political processes under globalisation

The Central Asian former republics of the USSR, that obtained their independence in 1991 provide very interesting examples of these processes and the contradictions that they produce in some contemporary societies. These republics were part of the USSR which was a state entirely defined by an ideological obedience to communism: indeed the strongest and the more influencial of the 20th century ideologies that theorised and justified attempts at the authoritarian modernisation of society. The development of the economy and welfare, the modernisation of social relations through the struggle against religion and traditions, thus, were the main basis of legitimacy claimed by the state. A mode of legitimisation that characterised the period of the 1920-70s and was shared, in spite of ideological dissent, across the whole world and especially in the so-called developing countries. The making and structuring of a working class was among the main concerns of Soviet policies. In fact the communist regimes' project was to transform the whole society into a working class for the eventual realisation of communism. This was a fiction, of course, and must be understood as such, but it led to some of the strongest ways of stabilising labour in the world. Social status and access to social facilities (housing, health, retirement, holidays, sometimes even a whole range of commodities from food to cars, etc.) were organised on the basis of the positions of individuals in the sphere of work.

The collapse of the USSR had an immediate ideological and economic effect. The disappearance of the communist reference meant the sudden vanishing of the idea of the authoritarian modernisation of society as the main basis of state legitimacy. New independent states — and especially Uzbekistan where maybe this phenomenon reaches its highest degree — turned rapidly to a nationalist discourse, inexistent before (unlike the European former republics of the USSR where nationalist movements and demands for independence had long existed). Like its neighbours, the new Uzbek regime, ruled by the former secretary of the republic's communist party, tried to find a legitimacy on the bases of identity issues. This shift was all the more dramatic because the president was challenged on this terrain by the two political parties that formed rapidly after the collapse of the Union and were banned a few months later, their leaders being forced to exile. The new nationalist rhetoric is centred on the president's discourses and works (more than half a dozen books) that are studied from elementary school to university. It is relayed by the academy of sciences where ethnographers, historians, archeologists and philosophers are in charge

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excellent analysis of the political importance of working class formation in African colonies, see Cooper (1996).

of producing the new ‘state ideology’. The necessity of the latter, to replace the communist ideology that was rejected immediately after independence, has been theorised in one of the president’s books and developed under the title of ‘national’ (i.e. Uzbek) ideology or ‘national idea’ (Selim, 2007). Thus, the official (which implies the scientific) discourse endlessly glorifies Uzbek identity, in the past, present and future, proclaims its ancient presence on the territory and the antiquity of ‘Uzbek statehood’. The invention of the Uzbek national identity that has been effected since independence is not entirely new, as it continues the processes that were initiated as early as the 1920s by the Stalin’s nationalities policy: with some methods very similar to those of Western Europe (Hobsbawm, 1990), the USSR and its academics invented Uzbek ‘nationality’ and the different other ‘nationalities’ that made up the Soviet Union, differentiating the persian-speakers (Tadjiks) from the turkish-speakers (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Tatars, Karakalpaks, etc.). Each ‘nationality’ was given a language, a national history, some traditions, a folklore, a literature and, of course, a territory and politico-administrative institutions (Roy, 1997). What is particular to the postsoviet period, though, is the radicalisation of the phenomenon, its focus only on Uzbek identity (ignoring the other ‘nationalities’ that are present in Uzbekistan and are relegated to the position of national minorities, becoming somehow foreigners in their own country). Over and above this, the most dramatic shift that has resulted from independence is the anchoring of state legitimacy in the sole foundation of such an imaginary autochthony. Although the Soviet regime invented the ‘nationalities’ and institutionalised their differentiation, it justified its existence and, indeed, its authoritarianism, on the bases of progress, economic development and the modernisation of society; it intended to struggle against the so-called traditions for the same reasons. In contrast, the new ‘national’ regime establishes its own justification in the ‘roots’ of a self-proclaimed autochthony and through the identification with a great mythical past; it now glorifies the Uzbek traditions that have, thus, to be reinvented, and are somehow sanctified by the intervention of state power. Analogous occurrences of the autochthonisation of state legitimacy can be observed in many other countries in the contemporary world (Bazin, Selim, 2001) and are, indeed, intrinsically tied to globalisation processes.

A second characteristic which appears to be inherent to globalisation everywhere is, as I suggested before, the spectacular changes that took place in the sphere of work. The dismantling of the Soviet economic system and network meant a brutal decline of Uzbek industry and the emergence of massive unemployment, partially compensated by a large extension of all sorts of ‘informal’ or petty jobs, and by both internal and external labour migrations. What is interesting in the case of Uzbekistan as in the rest of the USSR, is that this rather common process of the destruction of salaried work was abrupt and took place in a country where — as in Europe though in a different manner — salaried work had been generalised. Furthermore, in Uzbekistan this was not primarily a consequence of liberalisations, privatisations and massive dismissals of employees as one can observe in so many places, among the so called ‘post-industrial’ countries as well as the ‘developing’ states; it was instead the result of an internal disintegration of the soviet economic system. It was also the outcome of the huge financial crisis that occurred before and after the collapse of the USSR: wages and pensions decreased to such a low level that salaried work ceased to be an attractive proposition in itself. Indeed, in Uzbekistan, there was no ‘shock therapy’ as, for instance, in neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; the changes in legislation and practices were very slow. Although a rapid freeing of petty trade allowed a rapid expansion of a ‘bazaar’ economy, and the — much more progressive and erratic —

privatisation of the remains of the economic system has been almost achieved 15 years after independence, one can say that there was no liberalisation at all. The state still exerts a conspicuous control over corporate activities and continues to plan a large part of the economy, especially agricultural production but also entire parts of the industrial sector, for instance through the foundation of 'mixed companies' with foreign investors, or through the creation of nominally private business associations that organise certain economic sectors. There is no doubt that, as elsewhere, privatisations have meant the capture of wealth by the ruling *nomenklatura* — the most prominent and hated character symbolising the cupidity of state power and supposed to try and possess every sector of the economy being, as in the other Central Asian countries, the president's older daughter. And yet, this takes place in Uzbekistan through the conserving and even strengthening of some authoritarian models of ruling the economy. This is why I suggested earlier that there is no dominance of the economy in the country, and that the progress of market institutionalisation had been blocked. Stating this does not diminish, of course, the external pressures mainly from international banks and Western states for more rapid and complete 'reforms'. Though some detailed investigation would be necessary to have a better knowledge, there is no doubt that the economy and the processes of wealth accumulation as well as Uzbek society as a whole remain under the increasingly tyrannical domination of state authority.

Indeed, I would claim that these two features — the autochthonisation of the basis of state legitimacy and the disintegration of the salaried work system, which includes the social protections attached to salaried work — are the two main characteristic expressions of globalisation in Uzbekistan. They can be considered as the local crystallisation of trends that are shared under different forms by the whole world. What seems paradoxical and interesting in the case of Uzbekistan is that it happens in a situation where state *dirigisme* has been maintained for a great part, and where the implementation of neoliberal models of economic (de)regulation has been blocked and rejected by the political authorities.

Even if a weak stream of foreign investment is slowly beginning to come into sight (led by Russian, Turkish and South Korean interests), the country remains to a large extent outside the so-called world market. Its growing economic and political marginalisation is aggravated by its being the most landlocked country in the world[5]. As the other Central Asian states, the country can be considered to be one of the most dramatic examples of the re-arrangement of the economic spaces that globalisation generates. Its close integration into the Soviet economic space — fundamental because the subsidising of transport that was practised since the revolution abolished the effect of distances for remote republics — was brutally brought to an end; instead, in the interval of a few years, the country found itself secluded on the very margins of the new international economic and political order. The industries ran out of supply or demand; prices took off for consumers as well as factories; hyperinflation crises devastated salaries and incomes. Fifteen years later, the 'gradual' transition toward a market economy alleged by the authorities turns out to be merely a chimera, a screen unfolded for the projections of Western countries' and international organisations' fantasies, but one that is falling to pieces. It becomes increasingly gloomy nightmare for a large majority of the Uzbekistani people who find themselves locked in with the bitter disillusion brought about by the independence era, in an obvious and troublesome contradiction with public discourses.

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[5] It is the only state in the world from which it is necessary to cross as least two other countries to reach an open sea. For an evalutation of the economic consequences of being landlocked, see Raballand (2005).

Migrations and new proletarianisation processes

I have conducted anthropological fieldwork in the sphere of work mainly in three specific sites. The first, with some workers — male and female — of a large textile factory in Tashkent, took place during three months in 2004. I met these workers again in 2005. They are mostly young men and women, who live in the countryside around Tashkent. Created in 1999, the company is owned jointly by a South Korean corporation and the Uzbek state. It has established its own network of buses that transport the workers from their remote villages, up to 80 kilometres away, to the worksite, and back. The traffic of buses gets in motion three times a day as the working schedule changes between morning, afternoon and night shifts. The plant produces thread out of raw cotton, mainly for export, and hires around 3000 employees, for the most part 18-25 year old unmarried women from the rural area. The turn-over is high as the salaries are low and the conditions of work harassing, without any holidays. Moreover, the discipline imposed by the Korean executives is very strict, and every fault may be penalized by immediate dismissal.

The second investigation was carried out over six months in 2005 among young workers of the construction sector, which appears to be one of the very few dynamic branches of the economy. Indeed, this sector shows the signs of a rapid expansion that itself illuminates some of the most crucial characteristics of the society today. The social changes can be scrutinized through their architectural materialisation. The post soviet regime hurried to authenticate its new existence through the erection of huge edifices aimed at symbolising both a nationalised state authority and its self-proclaimed greatness; furthermore, the towns are being covered with buildings (mostly one or two floor houses) in a new style, which expresses the emergence of economic differences and inequalities that did not exist before. In particular, the members of a recent wealthy class — linked to the state or the mafia networks and who are called, as in Russia, the ‘new Uzbeks’ — are building vast and eccentric ‘cottages’ (local word : *kottej*) that have spread rapidly in the centre of Tashkent and other residential parts of the town over the past few years. The phenomenon is recent and probably due to a shift in the relations between the state authorities and the new rich as the transgression of the 1995 president’s prohibition of such ostentatious exhibition of riches seems to have become possible since the early 2000s. But not only does the urban landscape change, expressing the new political power as well as the new importance of economic wealth in the making of statuses: in a context of de-industrialisation, de-professionalisation of highly skilled employees and of massive unemployment, the construction sector has become a major source of jobs and incomes for a part of both the urban and rural population. The social groups with which my second field investigation was concerned, thus, were mainly young men migrating from remote provinces to Tashkent, by teams of 5 to 15 individuals, generally all inhabitants of the same villages or even sometimes all relatives.

With both these two groups of workers, I investigated not only the conditions and relations of work but also family relations. Furthermore, I visited some of the migrants’ villages (around Tashkent, and as far as Karakalpakstan: the furthest north-western region of the country), to interview family members but also to try and understand life in the villages, the economic situation and the changes induced by the transformation of kolkhozes into a system of ‘private’ farmers. The latter do not own the land which is only conceded by the state for a certain period of time (from 5 to 50 years) by a 'contract' which also fixes the kind of crop to be grown (wheat, cotton) and the norms (or plan) to be reached.

Among the complementary research that I have conducted, I will only mention a short study with some other workers who constitute a new social group: the so-called *mardikor*. These are men and women coming from the rural areas and gathering on the market places or along the main roads, waiting for someone to hire them for a temporary job: a few hours, a full day, sometimes several days. In a country where poverty has become a shared condition for a vast majority of the population, the *mardikor* and especially the women *mardikor*, fleeing their villages, homes and families, selling themselves in the *bozor* (Uzbek for bazaar) or the pavements to try and earn some money in rough conditions have become the emblem of this new poverty. Indeed, the women who are forced literally 'in the street'[6] to look for money turn out to be less subject to moral blame or a shame for themselves than the symbol of a 'national shame': they symbolise the 'abjection' — as Ferguson (1999) would say — that strikes the whole country more and more harshly since independence as they also appear to be the most appalling living contradiction to the official rhetoric of national grandeur.

All the situations that were investigated illustrate what I mentioned earlier: the workers concerned form a new, massive and very unstable working class, composed of newly proletarianized peasants whose permanent or mainly temporary migration to the towns is a consequence of the collapse of the rural economy, the decline of kolkhozes and their recent dismantling. Their precarious situation is reproduced by the conservation of the soviet system of residence registration that transforms them into illegal immigrants in their own country: they cannot legally live and be employed in Tashkent. This category of workers tends to replace the ancient soviet working class. The latter had a stable and quite prestigious condition, especially for workers in large factories. They had good wages, generally higher for simple workers than for their team leaders or the engineers, and were allowed a solid social protection, including retirement funds, free health services, housing, allowances for children, access to places for rest and holidays, etc. The former working class had a 'cosmopolitan' composition as it involved people of all the origins and 'nationalities' of the Soviet Union: they came to Tashkent as it was an attractive city (the fourth of the Union, after Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, and Central Asia's main cultural and industrial pole) with a good climate or, in the previous decades, as a consequence of the deportation of peoples to Central Asia in Stalin's times (Germans, Koreans, Krim Tatars, Chechens, Turks, etc. and all the 'undesirable'). As I suggested before, the collapse of the USSR induced the unmaking of the working class through at least two processes: 1) a huge number of non-Uzbek workers migrated to either Russia or their region of origin (for instance, Tatars to Krim) or the newly independent country corresponding to their ‘nationality’ (Ukrainians to Ukraine; Kazakhs to Kazakhstan; Germans to Germany; Jews to Israel; Russians, Tatars, Koreans to Russia, etc.). 2) a maybe even more important number of Uzbek or non-Uzbek workers/employees were heavily struck by periods of inactivity of their factory — no production means no salary — or disheartened by the harsh reduction of their wages to almost nothing; thus they tried to find new sources of income, either in Uzbekistan or elsewhere.

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[6] *Ko'chada* (outside, literally : in the street) is an omnipresent word that has a large range of meanings. *Ko'chada ishlamoq* or *ko'chada biznes qilmoq* (working/doing business outside, in the street ; or even being in the street) is a common expression that has very different connotations for men and women, as one can expect. For men, it can describe an activity that does not take place in an office or a particular worksite, from hard work in the construction sector, for instance, to trade in the market or to obscure 'street' traffics. For women, it may signify just any job 'outside' (the house) as it is 'obviously' not the role and the place of a woman to stay and work in any other place than her father's or her husband's house. Thus, the term also bears an ambiguous meaning and the suspicion of immorality, as 'working in the street' also designates, of course, prostitution. In 2003, Yulduz Usmonova, the most popular Uzbek pop star (*yulduz*=star) performed a song complaining about the women of Uzbekistan being obliged to go out *ko'chada*, outside their houses, in the streets, to work and earn money.

Founded in 1999 and built over the ruins of a former compound, the textile factory where the research was conducted in 2004 is particularly exemplary of the replacement of this former soviet working class by the new social stratum formed of proletarianized young peasants: it rapidly got rid of the first groups of workers recruited in Tashkent, and preferred to send buses into the countryside to hire young women (and men) who were more submissive and ready to work for lower wages. Outside the industrial sector, the two other fields of investigation (construction sector workers and, most of all, the *mardikor*) are even more significant examples of these processes of proletarianisation (ironically, in the very sense of Marx). In fact, the rural areas are affected by the difficulties of the kolkhozes and more recently by their dismantling. But the peasants are heavily hit above all by a radical devaluing of their labour power: minimum wages are particularly low (US $ 4 per month in 2004; US $ 6 in 2005; the equivalent of the price of 2 kg of meat) and are supposed to be the salaries of the kolkhoze workers. Yet, the kolkhozes were often out of cash and paid with cotton oil or wheat flour. The farmers who took hold of the lands — the former executives of the collective system — often pay less than the minimum wages to those who have become ‘their peasants’ more than their wage workers and have sometimes no other choice than to acquiesce in expecting in exchange of their work, not a salary, but rather access to a hectare or two of land or the possibility to harvesting cotton in the autumn (paid 30 to 40 sums/kg)[7]. More than in urban areas, families in the countryside are facing a demonetarisation of the economy, a devaluation of their labour power (in the literal sense: it has become of almost no value whereas it was paid, one or two decades earlier), and the restriction of their possibilities of access to monetary resources. They have exchanged the relationships of servility towards state authorities for potential personal relations of dependance on the farmers. The latter, through the ‘contracts’ associated with the concession system (they can be dispossessed of the land in particular if they do not reach the plan or for any pretext), remain closely dependant on state authorities. Deprived of the possibility of employment and of salaries as well as access to land (when they are not farmers), the peasants tend to rely for their subsistence on the little plot of land that they own beside their house and that they cultivate to grow everything they need, from wheat flour for bread, to rice and vegetables; they save money (and have it ‘reproduce’ itself) mainly by raising cattle. They can obtain a little additional monetary income by selling milk, fruits from their trees or the surplus of vegetables.

Yet, even such a regime of autarchy seems out of reach. The families need money at least for the organisation of the celebrations that accompany ceremonies like weddings or the circumcision of boys. Such celebrations, all named by the same term *to’y* constitute the core of the system of social relations, a key locus of their reproduction and they are, for this very reason, a main duty for the parents toward their children. Their cost, in those social strata of peasants and workers, reaches approximately 2 to 3 million sums (US $ 2 to 3,000). They represent, then, the major reason of expenditure and create an imperative need of liquid money that has either to be found urgently or laboriously accumulated over several years. This, indeed, constitutes one of the main objectives (but not the only one, however) of many young men leaving their home villages and their families, to whom they display particularly strong ties, to try and find in towns sources of monetary income that have become almost inexistent in their native countryside.

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[7] 1200 sums = US$ 1.

The spectre of state authoritarianism on the worksite

One of the main characteristics of the large textile factory about which I conducted research is the harshness of the working conditions, associated with a total absence of any idea of rights, or even rules, in the workers'consciousness, or at least in their discourses. The posture shown — I would say that it was almost compliantly performed — by most of the (male and female) workers was an absolute submission to a severe discipline, tiring work and arbitrary authorities. In the absence of any possibility of directly observing relations inside the factory (the interviews were conducted in the homes of the workers, in their villages, or sometimes in open air cafés, particularly in the case of young women) we are obliged to consider and analyse this attitude. Almost all the workers talked about working conditions or labour relations as if there were no rules at all. For instance, there was no weekly holiday, nor any other holiday, but they never mentioned the existence of a precise mode of calculation for the payment of over-time, or for night-time work. They even seemed never to understand how their salary was calculated, in a situation where the wages were low and where any variation was critical. In the factory, there was no structure for any negociation or any communication. This is a new situation compared to the USSR: in the Soviet system, and especially in large factories, authority was shared between the management, the trade-union (*provsoyuz*) and the party committee. Hence, there were more possibilities for the workers to find ways of mediating problems when they occurred.

In the factory where I conducted fieldwork, every event, every decision always appeared to the workers' eyes as if there was no reason, no explanation for it. They thus tended to present themselves as being absolutely dependent on the arbitrary power of the Korean *masters* or, at a higher level, of the two directors (Korean and Uzbek). *Master* is the Russian term for the team leaders in the workshop; it implies the idea of authority and good knowledge, experience or skills concerning the machines and work tasks (the usual and general Russian term to designate the rulers is *nachalnik*). The female workers were organised in teams of about 10, under the direction of a *brigadir* assisted by a *lider*. In each workshop, these teams of women and their few male colleagues (who either pushed the trolleys or were mechanics) were placed under the responsibility of a male *master*. All these teams were supervised by Korean technicians, called either *masters* or *nachalniks*, and by their Uzbek counterpart, who was the workshop supervisor. If the workers, especially the women, found the discipline very tough, they never denounced it nor their chiefs' arbitrariness. In fact, sumission and dependence are the common postures in the field of work. There seems to be no other alternative in the workers' eyes whenever they happen to get discouraged or dissatisfied, than to abandon their job, which indeed happens very often. More generally (in this firm as in other ones) the structure of the narratives, when people talk about the conditions in which they have left their previous employment, is very frequently: "I was unjustly reprimanded by (or, had an argument with) my *master*, so I left the factory".

This situation is in marked contrast to a piece of research that I conducted in the early 1990s in a factory in the Ivory Coast, where the relations of dependence were also very strong and played a crucial role but were always the pretext to numerous and varied protests (Bazin, 1998). In the context of Uzbekistan, discourses about labour relations remain very poorly developed, especially concerning their hierarchical aspect, and are dominated by a posture of absolute submission. There is no doubt that this is partially the result of the reluctance to express, in front of a foreign ethnologist and his assistant translator, any grievance toward the authority. And yet, it shows a compliant attitude which reflects the actual impossibility of contradicting any form of authority. This can be interpreted as an effect of the brutality of state repression, and of the fear that it induces.

Let us remember that in Uzbekistan, and contrary to the situation in postsoviet Russia for instance (Clément, 2000), there has not been any workers' movement or strikes, even if the possibility of exercising the right to go on strike has been theoretically guaranteed by the constitution. In fact, some attempts occurred here and there, but they were promptly repressed and no information about what happened found its way out of the workplaces. Indeed the impossibility of expressing discontent, either personally or, even less so, collectively, is not specific to the domain of industrial production. Shortly after independence, the Uzbek regime has successfully eradicated all likelihood of the expression of dissent. The political opposition did not exist more than a few months after independence in 1991, and thus does not constitute a challenge; some muslim fundamentalist movements — the other source of organised, and even armed, opposition — are still ferociously and indiscriminately repressed[8]; NGOs have been progressively banned since 2004, so that there only remained state controlled 'GONGOs' in 2006[9] (Hours, 2005). The reinforcing of state *dirigisme* and authoritarianism, thus, has been uninterrupted since the brief period of relative freedom that was brought about at the end of perestroika and the collapse of the communist system. And yet, the year 2004 marks a clear intensification of political pressure that culminated in the frightening repression of the Andijan revolt in May 2005[10] and the deployment of propaganda and surveillance that followed. The regime exerts an effect of terror so deeply interiorised by the majority of citizens — especially among the worker and peasant social strata, and among older generations — that any formulation of a disagreement, or even of a social or economic 'problem' negated by its rhetoric of a glorious future for the country, means for everyone a clear transgression. The omnipresent consciousness of transgression, more than the real danger of effective negative consequences of 'telling the truth' (which are very unlikely in the context where the interviews were conducted) induces a perceptible feeling of threat and indefinite fear of revenge by the officials. Indeed, the relationship to the political sphere in Uzbekistan is constructed out of the consciousness of prohibition and the risk of death.

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[8] Among the constellation of more or less fundamentalist movements — all considered by the government as dangerous 'wahabits', whereas being too zealous in the practice of prayers or the frequenting of the mosques can be a sufficient pretext for arbitrary arrestation, torture, deportation to camps, disappearances — are the armed IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) probably destroyed by the American invasion in Afghanistan, and the Izb-ut-tahrir, an international network of islamists partisans of a 'pacific' restauration of a califate.

[9] Hours (2005). The GONGOs are (ironically) Government Operated NGOs. The shift occurred shortly after the destitution of president Shevarnadze in Georgia, in which the Soros foundation and the network of NGOs obviously financed by the American government or foundations truly took a great part. In Uzbekistan, the Soros foundation was closed in April 2004 like most NGOs, the rest were closed the following year after the Kyrgyz revolt and the terrible repression of Andijan's uprising (May 2005).

[10] The army deliberately opened fire on the crowd to commit a massacre. There were between 500 and 1,000 killed.

The attitude observed among the workers towards hierarchy and the factory management, then, reveals the symbolic effectiveness of state tyranny, beyond the field of political matters. In this particular industrial unit in 2004, the workers clearly described the factory's order and discipline as being dominated and ruled by 'foreigners' (Korean technicians and *masters* and, above the hierarchical edifice, the distant figure of the Korean president-director) as if the 'Uzbek part' (as they say) would definitely play a subordinate role inside the company: the Uzbek *masters* as well as the workshop supervisor or even the Uzbek director are not considered as possible decision makers, even though the latter's position indicates, in itself, that he is a member of the ruling class and close to the government. And yet, the power of these *foreign masters* is being represented exactly the same way as the power of political authorities. It is, in their view, an abusive, arbitrary, tyrannic, out of reach figure that condemns its subordinates to absolute submission and leaves no possibility to negociate or even to communicate. Everything indicates that — in this particular place where the observations were conducted — no symbolic or tangible mediation was ever likely to contain the hardship of state oppression and the fear that it generates.

A tradition of compliance ?

The situations of work that have been evoked do not constitute definite professional categories: there exists a large degree mobility from one occupation to another in line with their unstable nature as well as the opportunities that a person might get, depending on his/her networks. For instance, numerous workers, though sometimes very young, had moved from the cultivation of their familial plot to a job in the local factory for a few months and then had changed for a place in a team of workers in the construction sector, went back to their village for a period of time, moved to another team on a building site, in the regional town, in Tashkent or sometimes abroad (Kazakhstan or Russia). When the textile factory's workers get fired from their job, or leave it, they may for instance alternate periods of work on building sites with periods of work for local farmers, and occupy their 'free' time by growing vegetables on the plot of land behind their house. Some civil servants, very badly paid especially in the remote countryside, choose to move to the city to earn money as *mardikor* when they cannot find a place on a building site or sell anything on the bazaars. All of those workers may cease to work to help harvest cotton or wheat in their villages. But when the season to harvest cotton has come, peasants may also gather on *mardikor* bazaars in their region or along the borders of Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan where the wages are higher… but also the chances to be swindled. In such conditions, the situations of work become very unscertain and, even if one can observe that the skills attached to a particular job — in textile factories, for the masons, etc. — are considered of high value, they do not necessarily lead to personal stable investment when a work position can be given up for better opportunities, though all of them are unsecure and short-term experiences.

As well as the disintegration of the former communist ideology and the official conversion to nationalism and to the pretended 'revival' of traditions, the generalisation of economic insecurity and the undermining of professional positions helped strengthen family ties after the collapse of the USSR. Newly sacralised by the political power but also by the rise in the importance of religion, family and kin relationships appear as a refuge against economic (and political) adversity. They, indeed, also constitute a social field characterised by submission to the authority, sometimes truly tyrannic, represented by the head of the family: the father, very commonly designated as *xo'jayin* (boss, landlord, owner)[11], but also the mother toward her sons' spouses. The latter are named *kelin* — bride, daughter/sister-in-law[12] — and their role is clearly to become at least for a certain period of time after their marriage, the whole family's servant under the mother's supervision[13].

The key moment for the demonstration of the family's dignity and honour, in the neighbourhood's eyes, is the arrangement of marriages and the organisation of *to'y*: those festivities that accompany mainly weddings and the circumcision of boys, where all the neighbourhood and family networks are invited and involved in very complex exchanges. Marriage strategies, thus, have come to have a new importance since independence. Weddings represent a larger – and more crucial – part of the destination of the monetary incomes, at least as a mechanical result of the devaluation of salaries. Thus the families' political economy is increasingly organised around the wedding moment as its very core. During the research, the workers who I met all tended to talk expansively about their marriage – either future or past ; or else their children's marriage for older workers – whereas it was difficult to get them to discuss work relationships; the political field being, as it has been said, a forbidden domain, signifying a threat of death. Marriage, then, plays an ambiguous role at a symbolic and ideological level: it is the locus of the new potency of the family sphere against economic adversity and political oppression while constituting the most effective way for the anchoring of state authority within social relationships. Indeed, the glorification of marriage seals the alliance between the neotraditionalism of the local elites and the regime's ideological mode of legitimisation. An alliance that allows, in the name of morality and of 'true' Uzbek identity, the constitution of a hold over local society. This is the new, post-Soviet, neotraditionalised, form taken by political control over the population. In the narratives, the omnipresence of the word *o'zbekchilik* which means approximately: the Uzbek way, i.e. Uzbek traditions, expresses the effective authority of this combination of ethnicised morality and ethnicised traditions to which everyone has henceforth to submit.

I will conclude by stressing some paradoxical effects of the insertion of Uzbekistan in the process of globalisation. The end of the communist power, resulting in the forced and reluctant entry of the country into a new world system dominated by the so called 'unified' market, has obviously broken the political and ideological order that had been built previously, but also the kind of stable work arrangement shaped by the Soviet Union. The break-up of the Union, as well as the ruin of industry and agriculture provoked huge population movements, bringing about various forms of 'mobility' that are absolutely new in their intensity as well as in their very nature. They constitute, in a way, a materialisation of the market rules within social relationships, whereas it is impossible to consider that Uzbek political economy has been liberalised at all or has achieved some moves towards a system that could be called a ‘market economy’ (as the international experts usually dream it). And yet, the forms of mobility that have become inherent to the social and economic conditions of life in Uzbek society, do not lead to individual emancipation and the weakening of social control: on the contrary, in this era of economic insecurity, both violent domination by the state and the fascination for the family in the name of tradition and morality, contribute to reinforcing the repression of individuality, and to placing individuals in strong relations of dependance that always appear in their own eyes as overwhelming.

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[11] Exactly the same term is used to designate a factory's boss, director or owner: the term *xo'jayin* does not allow any difference between these categories of meaning.

[12] Adequately translating kinship terms is always impossible, as it produces a clear ethnocentric bias (see Geffray, 1990). *Kelin* designates a women both as bride and young spouse for her husband's whole family, where she is a foreigner (the word derives from *kelmoq* : to come. *Kelin* is the one who comes into the family from outside).

[13] The mother's status changes, of course, when her older son gets married. The processes are very similar to those which Camille Lacoste-Dujardin has analysed in the case of Algeria (Lacoste-Dujardin, 1985).

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