

Everyday Life
in
Central Asia
Past and Present

EDITED BY

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To the countless Central Asians who have opened their doors and hearts to us and with whom we have shared meals and affection, joys and frustrations, and hopes and fears. We hope this book makes some contribution toward a deeper understanding of how much we all deserve a better world, even as we seek different pathways toward that end.

6. The Limits of Liberation: Gender, Revolution, and the Veil in Everyday Life in Soviet Uzbekistan

Douglas Northrop

Banners waved, music played, and local newspapers reported an “un-ceasing hubbub of girls’ voices, happy songs, [and] infectious dancing” among the crowds in early October 1935, when the First All-Uzbek Congress of Laboring Female Youth opened in Tashkent.¹ Amid triumphal Stalinist pageantry, several hundred young women arrived in the Uzbek capital city to discuss the issues and problems faced by indigenous women in Soviet Central Asia. The delegates came from throughout Uzbekistan and across the region, and a few hailed from farther away, from Moscow and other Muslim areas such as Azerbaijan. Most were young, married Uzbek peasant women who had joined the Young Communist League (*Komsomol*) after completing rudimentary schooling.² They embodied the promise of Soviet liberation after nearly twenty years of Bolshevik power, as Soviet press coverage related in glowing terms how far Uzbek women had come since 1917—and especially since 1927, when the Communist Party had with great fanfare launched a major ongoing campaign to improve the social status of women in Central Asia. The 650 young women at the congress—politically active, economically independent, and apparently eager to fight local patriarchy—were taken as living evidence of this campaign’s success. Soviet newspapers proudly noted that some delegates had even trained as parachutists: a far cry from the strict practices of female seclusion and heavy horsehair veils that were said to have shaped their everyday lives before the arrival of Soviet emancipation.³

Amid the pomp and circumstance, however, dissonant notes could be heard. Even as they tried to leave listeners with an upbeat, inspirational message, many speakers pointed to continuing failures of the party’s concerted effort to “liberate” the Muslim women of Uzbekistan. In one of the



An Uzbek woman with her children. She wears a head-to-toe robe of heavy cotton, known as a *paranji*, which holds in place over her face a *chachvon*, or mesh screen of woven horsehair
Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kinofotodokumentov.

main speeches at the congress, I. Artykov, a top leader of the Uzbek Kom-somol, tried to outline the profound yet contradictory meanings of Soviet power in the ten-year-old Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. By 1935, Bolshevik efforts in Central Asia had focused on women's liberation for almost a decade, and Soviet authorities and women's activists had mobilized the full force and considerable authority of the Stalinist state to make this vision a reality. What had their efforts meant in practice? One of Artykov's examples, which recounted the life story of Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova, a young Uzbek girl orphaned early in life who now worked productively for the Soviet state, provided an unexpectedly revealing answer. Despite her ostensible status as a liberated Soviet woman, Tashmatova's biography actually served more to show that everyday life in Uzbekistan had changed only in some ways, and not always in the direction the party had intended. More than anything else, her story illustrated the severe constraints that existed on Soviet power in Muslim Central Asia during the 1930s.

Artykov started by describing Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova's difficult childhood. After being orphaned at a young age, he said, Tashmatova had been raised by two older sisters. Unfortunately, one sister died when she was just nine years old and the other when she was thirteen. Her only brother was then working in a distant province, so Tashmatova was left alone and

soon found herself forced to marry her elder deceased sister's forty-five-year-old husband. This man already had seven wives, Artykov noted, not to mention business connections in Afghanistan (where he had lived for several years) and personal links to prominent anti-Soviet figures. Tashmatova's life became still more difficult when her new husband returned from Afghanistan and started working as a Soviet official (of all things) in the town of Denau. Several times she ran away from him, but on each occasion he used his new government connections to have her caught and forcibly returned to him. Fortunately, Artykov said, at this point the Soviet police discovered his association with anti-Soviet "bandits," and he was condemned to death and shot.

To the assembled delegates, many Young Communists and all Stalinist heroes, this story of revolutionary justice must have struck an inspirational note. The Soviet courts had ferreted out a traitor and thus struck a blow simultaneously against the forces of political counterrevolution and cultural patriarchy. At last, they might have expected to hear, Soviet power had enabled Tashmatova to achieve economic independence, political liberation, and personal fulfillment. It was an article of faith to many party activists that women in Soviet Uzbekistan could achieve full equality with men, and that they had the opportunity to attain levels of political consciousness that were impossible before 1917. Artykov's story, though, took a different turn. "After her husband had been shot," he continued,

other men courted and wooed her, and in the end she was again given forcibly into marriage, to one Jumamir Nasarov, the head of a local village soviet and before that a wealthy *boi* [landlord]. She was his second wife, and afterward he took a third. To prevent anyone holding him to account for his polygyny, he went to ZAGS [*Zapis' aktov grazhdanskogo sostoianiia*, the local Soviet civil registry office] and divorced both of his first two wives—but told them that according to the [Islamic law] code of *shariat* they [still] had to live [with him].

Fearing that Tashmatova's brother might return and see him mistreating his sister—and that he might then be denounced to Soviet authorities "as a former kulak and polygynist," Nasarov hired assassins to have the brother killed.

At this point Tashmatova surely could be forgiven some disillusionment with the Soviet cause. Yet she remained loyal, Artykov proudly declared, as she continued to plead for help from the authorities:

Ashur-Bibi went several times to the village soviet for help, asking for a divorce, but every time she was told that no divorce could be granted without her husband's permission.⁴ Finally she turned to a local agrono-

mist, who wrote to the district [capital], whence came a committee of inquiry that arrested Ashur-Bibi's husband. From there he managed to escape from custody, and—knowing that she had been the main reason for his arrest—he tried repeatedly, over several days, to kill her. Afterward he was again arrested and deported outside Uzbekistan.

At this point—at last—Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova seemed to be free. In 1931, Artykov said, she finally threw off her heavy black veil, joined the Young Communist League, and became a full-fledged Soviet worker, accepting a job as director of a nursery.

This was the moment of transfiguration required in any heroic Stalinist narrative. But what was her new, unveiled life like? How did it compare with the dark past? Artykov concluded his tale by describing Tashmatova's current home life—and made it clear that much still remained to be done:

Now she has a third husband. He, Babahanov, is a Soviet worker, a Komsomol member, the assistant director and secretary of the village soviet. She also was married to him against her will. For five or six months they lived together well, but afterward he started to demand that she abandon her social work, started to beat her and, finally, making use of his position in the village soviet, wrote an attestation of divorce, put it in her coat pocket, gathered up all of his things, and left. When he was called before the district executive committee and asked on what basis he had written this attestation, he declared that it had been a joke.

By 1935, Artykov noted, she had lived with Babahanov for two years, but had experienced only insults and mockery, even occasional threats on her life. Shortly before the congress convened, moreover, she had come to Tashkent for training—and he mailed her a divorce. One more time she sought official help, turning to her local Komsomol and her district party leader for assistance—but, Artykov concluded ruefully, “they did nothing.”⁵

Fluid social structures, population mobility across supposedly inviolable international borders, and the stark weakness of government and party organizations—indeed, local officials' active opposition to party policy: these are only some of the themes that emerge through this story of an orphaned Uzbek girl shuttled from one abusive husband to another. Apparent, too, is the Soviet emphasis on measuring the political and cultural level of Central Asian Muslims through the character of their intimate and family lives. This equation made it very difficult for even loyal women like Tashmatova to negotiate the conflicting demands that they faced. The complexities turned up by the tale of Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova—and, no less important, the way Artykov chose to tell her story—captures the unsettled flavor of this encounter between Soviet power and Muslim Central Asian society.

A QUOTIDIAN REVOLUTION: VEILS AND FAMILY LIFE IN THE SOVIET EMPIRE

Why did this encounter develop into a confrontation over the Uzbek family? What was at stake in the telling of Tashmatova's story? How did such apparently mundane details of everyday life take on broader political significance? How did women like Tashmatova maneuver between the demands of the Soviet state, on the one hand, and the requirements of religious devotion and perceived national customs, on the other? By 1935, when Artykov addressed the congress in Tashkent, the wider Stalin Revolution had been underway for seven years. This was an era of massive state and party campaigns that sought nothing less than to build a new kind of civilization in the USSR. While the capitalist West languished amid the Great Depression, these all-encompassing Stalinist campaigns aimed to restructure Soviet society completely, most obviously through rapid industrialization and the forced collectivization of peasant agriculture. They also aimed to create a new kind of Soviet citizen, through a “cultural revolution” that intended to produce a New Soviet Man (and, albeit usually less prominently, Woman). These were also the years of vast party purges and ultimately the nightmarish Great Terror of 1937–1938.

All of these campaigns had an impact on Soviet Central Asia: millions of Muslim nomads and peasants were settled on collective farms and put to work in new factories. In the later 1930s, top party officials were shot or sent to Siberia, while the landscape itself was reworked in huge projects such as the Ferghana Canal, which aimed to boost cotton production by making the desert fertile. Indigenous populations were simultaneously being recast, taught the various components of “cultured” behavior: to read Marx and Lenin; to visit a doctor when ill; to appreciate modern science, engineering, and art; and to wash one's body with soap. And as the unhappy tale of Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova makes plain, in southern Central Asia the turmoil of building a new world was also expressed in other realms of everyday life. New identities—local, regional, and national—emerged especially from bitter struggles over gender roles and intimate family relationships. Why?

By this point Bolshevik leaders had struggled for almost two decades to apply a Marxist framework to Central Asia. In 1917 the area had still been very rural, and the few urban workers who did exist tended to be Russians. Most lived separately from the local population in Europeanized “New Cities” that were built after the tsarist conquest. The lack of an indigenous proletariat complicated efforts to find allies in the region and led Bolsheviks to seek other ways to translate the party's program for building socialism into the largely Muslim cultural world of Turkistan. At

first they had tried to transform Central Asia by repeating campaigns that had been employed in Russia. Antireligious campaigns criticized Muslim clerics as "class oppressors," and a large-scale land and water reform in 1925-1926 aimed to redistribute these key resources to poor and landless peasants. By 1926, though, attacks on wealthy landlords and Islam had proved for the most part unsuccessful at creating either visible class identities or widespread pro-Bolshevik sympathies. The local Communist party was still tiny, isolated, and largely alien. It numbered only a few tens of thousands of members, concentrated almost entirely in the cities and drawn disproportionately from the ranks of recent immigrants to Central Asia.⁶

In response, in late 1926 the party's top regional leaders in Tashkent, acting through the supervisory body of the Central Asian Bureau (*Sredazbiuro*), decided, at the urging of enthusiastic activists in the party's Women's Department (*Zhenotdel*), to try a new approach.⁷ Local society was patriarchal, they reasoned, and many Muslim women, forced to stay hidden in public and secluded at home, saw themselves as victims of indigenous men, as much as of previous Russian imperialist oppressors. Party and Zhenotdel leaders thus developed an interpretation of Central Asian society in which all Muslim women were deemed victims of patriarchal oppression—in Marxist terms, they functioned as a "surrogate proletariat."⁸ In this view, women represented a massive, latent group of potential allies that the party could mobilize by publicizing a message of gender equality and liberation. If the Revolution was to succeed in Central Asia, in other words, it had to be translated into everyday life. To most Soviet women's activists—many of whom had little experience in the Islamic world—it seemed self-evident that such a message would be welcomed by their Muslim sisters.

Party activists in Tashkent launched their campaign on the socialist holiday of International Women's Day (March 8) 1927, calling it a *hujum*, or assault, against the "moldy old ways" of female seclusion and inequality. This campaign's goal was nothing less than the complete and immediate transformation of everyday life, or *byt* (in Uzbek, *turmush*), as measured especially in the realms of gender relations and family life. The *hujum* took different forms in different places, but in Uzbekistan, as well as Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, it aimed above all at the eradication of the head-to-toe veils that many urban Muslim women, and girls over the age of nine or ten, wore in the presence of unrelated men.* Despite the almost complete absence from party ranks of Uzbek women to help lead this effort, the mostly Russian activists of the Zhenotdel aimed to complete the heroic liberation of Central Asian women in less than six months—a schedule that would enable them to celebrate success by October 1927, the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.⁹

*These veils consisted of a heavy cotton robe (*paranji*) worn over a face screen of woven horsehair (*chachvon*).

It was at this point that Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova's struggle became a state priority, as a bitter and often violent confrontation ensued in the lives of thousands of local women like her. The campaign against the veil was complicated, contested, and contradictory; over the next fifteen years, it transformed all sides. Soviet reformers and their Muslim opponents alike came to define their cultural practices and social values through the everyday customs of millions of individual women. On the one hand, state action thus created unexpected possibilities for women: intensive efforts to transform and liberate Muslim women remained among the highest state and party priorities in Central Asia, even as women's issues fell from prominence elsewhere in the USSR during the 1930s. On the other hand, this common ground of debate ultimately helped define a specific, local, and deeply gendered vocabulary for both Central Asian Bolshevism and Uzbek national identity, and it left these women personally in a very difficult position, facing strong pressure from all sides.

How did they respond? This is a difficult question, because few of these women left written records to explain their opinions or motivations. But there are ways to use the sources that have survived to identify a broad spectrum of female (as well as male) views. For many local women, gender concerns were fully as important as party activists had hoped—and for these women, the *hujum* was a welcome portent of greater equality in male-female relations. Hundreds, even thousands of such women threw off their veils and kept them off. A handful went so far as to join the Zhenotdel, working assiduously to unveil others and to eliminate all forms of indigenous patriarchy. A few, such as the prominent women's activist Tojikhon Shadieva, became personal icons of liberation, with their life stories recounted in popular books, newspapers, museum exhibits, and inspirational films.¹⁰

Who were these women that responded to the Soviet call? Some were the wives and relatives of Communist Party members, especially high-ranking ones, who faced strong pressure to liberate their families at the outset of the unveiling campaign. Desperately poor female beggars and especially prostitutes—few of whom in any case had worn veils before—also sought Zhenotdel aid and support. Other Uzbek women unveiled for just the reasons party activists expected: they resented the restrictions placed on local women. For these women, the Soviet campaign brought new possibilities, even a real liberation. Although some unveilings were coerced by over-eager Bolshevik activists, the positive appeal of the campaign was also evident in the social locations of women who flocked to the cause. Shadieva, for example, came from a poor family: at age eleven, she had been married against her will to a middle-aged folk-healer, becoming his eighth wife.¹¹ Local women who unveiled during and after 1927 hailed disproportionately from such marginal social positions: orphans, widows, and runaway girls, for example, sought refuge in So-

viet institutions and women's clubs far out of proportion to their overall numbers.¹² This may have been due to their socialization in (and financial, physical, even emotional dependence on) state institutions. Equally plausible, though, is the possibility that they were enabled to unveil by their position outside local kin networks. They were thus less constrained by male relatives or social pressure, and perhaps more able to act as they wished.

But for the most part, Uzbek women who considered unveiling (or otherwise cooperated with Soviet activists) faced enormous pressure from their families and neighbors. While at home, husbands could prevent them from attending Soviet meetings or parades, and threatened divorce if they unveiled.¹³ Outside the home, any unveiled woman was assumed to be the equivalent of a prostitute, and frequently was treated as such. Fights broke out when schoolchildren taunted classmates about their newly unveiled mothers—who had, they shouted, taken up prostitution.¹⁴ Unveiled women bolstered themselves for harsh criticism every time they stepped outside. Raised in a culture that stressed honor as a paramount female virtue, they faced mockery and ridicule at every turn. The continual mutterings of “prostitute” from passersby had an effect, sometimes reducing the demoralized women to tears; they pleaded for help from Soviet authorities, saying that soon they would be driven to re-veil.

Consider the primary document included in the appendix below. This petition, written in 1928 by twenty schoolteachers in Samarkand, shows these women willing to speak up, to criticize and challenge the Soviet government for its lack of support, and to demand more help. It also gives a taste of the everyday danger these women faced: violence, either real or threatened, fundamentally shaped their daily lives. As this document reveals, participating in the hujum meant taking serious risks: in the late 1920s thousands of Muslim women in Central Asia were attacked, and frequently raped, for taking part. Hundreds were killed; some of the corpses were mutilated in grisly fashion. Often investigations concluded that male relatives of the victim—husbands, fathers, brothers—had carried out these murders to remove a perceived smirch on the family's honor.¹⁵

Yet men and women alike played a complicated role in this story. Some indigenous men in the party, after all, were among those trying to persuade (or force) local women to unveil. And for their part, only a relative handful of Uzbek women actually joined the Communist Party, or participated actively and consistently in the hujum.¹⁶ Many others tried to ignore the campaign, refusing to attend parades or official meetings, avoiding Soviet officials, and staying away from the Europeanized New Cities. Most indigenous women probably went about their daily lives as they always had done. Since few explained themselves in writing, historians now can only guess at their innermost views and beliefs. Yet the surviving sources do make plain the creativity of the ostensibly silent Uzbek woman in adapting the conflicting demands of the hujum to her world. Some women, for instance,

removed their paranji and chachvon, as called for by official campaign slogans (“Down with the paranji!”)—but then covered themselves just as completely with a shawl or other type of cloak, or in some cases a tablecloth. Others unveiled at demonstrations, only to re-veil before reaching home.¹⁷ When forced by party or Soviet officials to participate, many women showed themselves masters of *seeming* to cooperate, only as long and as far as was necessary. As the Andijon Zhenotdel put it in an unusually perceptive and discerning report in early 1928,

In the beginning [we] tried to prepare an accounting of the veiled and the re-veiled, but afterward became convinced that it was impossible to take such an inventory. After March 8, the paranjis that had been cast off and burned stuck tenaciously to the women's faces. Under the various influences of cultural traditions, the stagnation and ignorance of the local men, and the agitation of socially alien elements, women re-veiled themselves again with paranjis, with the sleeves of their cloaks [*khalats*], or with shawls. This category of “temporarily unveiled” is difficult to count as either “unveiled” or “veiled.” Many women go unveiled at meetings, at family circles, and also in the New City, but in their own *mahalla* (neighborhood) walk about veiled. It is the same in the villages.¹⁸

The same report went on to note that when jobs were available at the local cotton processing and dairy factories, only unveiled women had been considered eligible. Hence, many women left their veils at home to apply—but put them on again as soon as they left. The report concluded,

The Uzbek woman is very cautious. She boldly and confidently walks to women's meetings—unveiled. And to [Soviet] family circles; she goes [unveiled] wherever she knows that she will not run into insults, ridicule, and mockery. [But] it is hard to find unveiled women at the bazaars, or on the lively streets of the Old Cities. Here [the Uzbek woman] tries to cover herself, that is, [she veils] in those places where insults can most often be heard directed at the unveiled.¹⁹

Perhaps most surprising to Soviet activists at the time (and to many Western readers today), a few women even led the charge on the other side, bitterly denouncing the hujum, flatly refusing even to discuss the possibility of unveiling, and harshly criticizing women who did take part. Party activists were befuddled to find veiled women as well as men behind the street harassment and insults. In a handful of explosive cases, indeed—discussed only in whispers, and recorded in top-secret party dossiers—Uzbek women even organized violent resistance to their own “liberation.” In May 1929, for example, the secret police reported on one such anti-Soviet gathering of two hundred women in rural Andijon province. The women complained that their veils had been forcibly confiscated

on March 8, and they decided to hold a protest march on May Day—but events soon spiraled out of control. Led by Ugul Bi Rajababaeva, the wife of a former Soviet official, they marched to the local Soviet office building and demanded the return of their veils. When they were rebuffed, Rajababaeva pulled a knife on a senior police officer, who quickly fled the room. The women regrouped and about a dozen of them decided to try again—two days later, they showed up at the police officer's home, armed with knives and stones. Neither the officer nor his wife were at home, though, so the battalion of angry women then roamed the town, confronting and "savagely beating" unveiled women they found on the street.²⁰

The story of how Uzbek society responded to the unveiling campaign is obviously complicated. Given the various and conflicting meanings applied to the veil, though, the tenacity with which it was both attacked and defended becomes more understandable. In the longer term, the Soviet decision in 1927 to focus on dramatic public unveilings proved mostly counterproductive; by hardening Muslim hostility toward Bolshevik agitators perceived as foreign urban atheists, it made cultural change more rather than less difficult. And by deeming the veil a preeminent symbol of Muslim Uzbek culture, the Bolsheviks only gave it new strength. Conflict over women's lives—as seen in the congress of 1935 and in the ongoing street confrontations—thus represents a story of resistance and power, but one far more complex than it first appears. Bolshevik leaders inadvertently reinforced the seclusion of Uzbek women in the short term, effectively creating powerful resistance to their own women's liberation policies. Despite stated goals to the contrary, that is, Soviet efforts played a large role in creating the veil as a national symbol and an emblem of a "tradition" that was in fact quite new.²¹

Although the campaign of 1927 aimed to eliminate the veil within six months, it actually took far longer—perhaps thirty years or so—until the *paranji* and *chachvon* did fade from everyday use. The reasons for this shift in the 1950s and 1960s fall outside the scope of this essay, but they arose in a fundamentally different historical context—one shaped especially by the massive, social, cultural, and demographic changes during and after World War II. That war played a key role in remaking Central Asia. It was a hugely destructive conflict—roughly 27 million Soviet citizens and soldiers died overall—and Central Asians participated fully. Millions of Slavic citizens were evacuated to the East, to the Urals and Central Asia; many Russian orphans were settled with poor Uzbek families, as local Muslim men marched away to fight Hitler. Everyday life in Central Asia—not to mention the attitude of Central Asians toward the Soviet state, which so many died to defend—changed fundamentally in the 1940s. The veil's slow decline fits into this broader postwar Sovietization of everyday life and culture in Uzbekistan.²²

Yet the *hujum's* other, sometimes unintended, legacies did not disappear. At a minimum, the importance of the unveiling campaign and the

fierceness of the conflict that ensued showed how intricately gender relations came to be interwoven with relations of social and political power in Central Asia, and how women became central to and emblematic of an emerging Uzbek national identity. Indeed, women in some places (especially the Ferghana Valley) started wearing veils once again following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, as a way of expressing their national as well as religio-cultural identity.²³ It was no accident, then, that in 1935 Artykov had chosen to deliver his political message by retelling several individual women's life stories, among them that of Ashur-Bibi Tashmatova. To many Bolsheviks, the veiled woman was self-evidently an oppressed creature, symbolizing all that was most backward and primitive in the tsarist (capitalist) empire. She showed, they thought, the undeniable need for immediate Soviet uplift and emancipation. To the party's opponents, though, the unveiled woman, equally obviously, meant something else altogether: foreign, colonial control, along with sexual license, poor character, uncertainty over children's patrimony, the explicit denial of God and his law, and ultimately nothing less than the end of the world. Women such as Tashmatova were the ground for this struggle, and women's own agency thus remained a troublesome and difficult issue. Women's status as conscious actors, as people continually making decisions and individual choices to respond to the world around them, greatly complicated these countervailing narratives of liberation and resistance.

APPENDIX

Petition signed by twenty female schoolteachers and submitted to the Samarkand City Soviet, 1928. (RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 1692, ll. 51–52.)

If your fine statements about the liberation of women were sincere, then we ask you to consider this petition at the next meeting of the city soviet and to finally resolve, once and for all, the question of unveiling before March 8 [International Women's Day].

In the past, when we languished [at home, surrounded by] four walls, we endured the outrages of our husbands; now we, liberated women, appear as prostitutes in the imaginations of women who still wear the *paranji*.

Is this the reward of a proletarian government to us?

Having started [to pursue] the issue, you did not drive it to a conclusion, and then [you] declared that unveiling is a matter of the free will of women themselves. Based on this declaration, nearly all of the women who still wear the *paranji* are denouncing us for having sold out our faith, calling us shameless [women] and dogs of the street. . . .

At the time of our liberation, you told us that with regards to people who responded badly [both] to liberation and liberated women, you would take the very strictest measures. In this we still are not satisfied. On the

streets, at weddings, in other gatherings, everywhere and all around, we see and hear [nothing but] scornful attitudes and bad opinions, both from men and from women who are not unveiled.

[The petitioners admit that reporting such episodes to the *Zhenotdel*, the city soviet, or the district party committee (*raikom*) has sometimes secured results: arrests and some convictions have followed.]

But this has not at all given us any guarantee against cases of murder during our trips out of town or, just as much, the fermentation induced on secluded, out-of-the-way streets by the appearance of [our unveiled] faces. Against whom, then, can our lifeless body be avenged?

If even we working women, the loyal followers of Lenin, are [treated like this, facing insults and humiliation with every step], then nothing will be left for us but to shout 'Voidod!' ['Help!']* and to shout it not once, but thousands of times.

If you are not able to bring about the liberation of women, then we cannot go any further. [But] if a tree's roots remain [strong], then it will not wither away when attacks come on the surface.

If you really intend decisively to attack the paranji, then we request of you the following:

1. If a woman in a paranji brings wares to the market, let no one buy from her.
2. Cooperatives are not to sell goods to women in paranjis.
3. The judicial organs are not to hear the requests of women in paranjis.
4. Women in paranjis are not to be given medicines by clinics and drug-stores.
5. Members of the party and Komsomol, if their wives wear the paranji, are to be removed from their positions.
6. The daughters and sons of merchants are not to be accepted in Soviet schools.

If you do not implement these requests of ours before March 8, then do not blame your Red Teachers if they once again begin to wear the paranji.
[signed]

NOTES

This essay is revised and expanded from Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

1. M. P., "Chudesnyi splav," *Pravda Vostoka* (hereafter *PV*), 3 October 1935.
2. According to statistics compiled at the Congress, of the 650 women in atten-

*"Voidod!" literally means "Help!" but is uttered only at moments of extreme distress, sorrow, and despair.

dance, 576 were younger than age 24; 495 were ethnically "Uzbek"; 424 had joined the Komsomol; 451 were married; 502 were peasants; and only 90 had more than an elementary education. See Özbekiston respublikasi markaziy davlat arkhivi (hereafter ÖZRMDA), f. 86, op. 10, d. 634, ll. 346-350, or the published records at *Peroyi s'ezd trudiashcheisia zhenskoi molodezhi Uzbekistana* (hereafter *PSTZhMUz*) (Tashkent, 1936), 123-125.

3. M. P., "Chudesnyi splav."

4. She must have wished the village soviet to force her husband to grant her a religious (shariat) divorce, since he already had obtained a civil divorce at ZAGS.

5. She may have been seeking help to secure alimony, not necessarily trying to prevent the divorce. This story is taken from ÖZRMDA, f. 86, op. 10, d. 634, ll. 243-245. An edited version—omitting some of the most revealing information, such as the back-and-forth movement into Afghanistan—was published at *PSTZhMUz*, 63-64. Some stylistic editing in the published version is reflected in the story as quoted here.

6. In early 1926 the Uzbek SSR's Communist Party organization, the KP(b)Uz, reported a total of 18,351 members and candidate members, or less than 0.5 percent of the republic's overall population. Within this group, Europeans outnumbered Uzbeks, 9,043 to 7,736; men outnumbered women fifteen to one; and almost a third were completely illiterate, with only 2.2 percent boasting a higher education. (Z. Simanovich, "Itogi partiinnoi perepisi v Uzbekistane," *Izvestiia TsK KP(b)Uz*, no. 1 [1926], 9-10.)

7. It had been two centuries since Peter the Great ended the seclusion of elite Muscovite women.

8. An American political scientist formulated the phrase. See Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

9. A reckoning in July 1927 found only 457 Uzbek women in the KP(b)Uz. (ÖZRMDA, f. 86, op. 2, d. 27, l. 37.) This figure represents less than 2 percent of the Uzbek Communist Party's membership rolls; it also means that an essentially invisible proportion (roughly 0.03 percent) of the overall Uzbek female population had been enrolled in the party. On the expected rapid speed of the campaign, see ÖZRMDA, f. 86, op. 1, d. 5134, l. 25; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI), f. 62, op. 2, d. 1205, l. 4ob, and d. 1242, ll. 31 and 140ob; and Prezident devoni arkhivi, f. 58, op. 3, d. 1560, l. 57. Also Serafima Liubimova, "Oktiabr' i truzhenitsa zarubezhnogo Vostoka," *Za partiiu*, no. 3 (1927): 77-80. On these activists, see *Khudzhum: Znachiit nastuplenie* (Tashkent, 1987) and *Probuzhdennnye velikim Oktiabrem: Sbornik ocherkov i vospominanii* (Tashkent, 1961).

10. See, for instance, S. Normatov, *Tadzhikhon* (Tashkent, 1966).

11. Her husband, who was in his forties, reportedly had eight wives already, but one had died. Some sources, such as Normatov, list Tojikhon's age at marriage as fourteen rather than eleven.

12. Such women are discussed at *PSTZhMUz*, 63-66.

13. RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 1214, ll. 28, 38, 115, 146-147, and 154.

14. *Ibid.*, l. 56.

15. *Ibid.*, l. 75.

16. By 1933, the number of Uzbek women in the party reached approximately 3,500, or perhaps 0.2 percent of the indigenous female population. See Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 227.

17. RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 2056, l. 56, and ÖZRMDA, f. 86, op. 1, d. 5719, l. 16, and f. 736, op. 1, d. 933, l. 64ob.

18. RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 1690, l. 11.

19. Ibid, l. 13.

20. RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 2064, ll. 51–51ob.

21. Before the mid-nineteenth-century tsarist conquest of Central Asia, urban women had worn a different sort of head covering, the *mursak*, which did not cover the face. The *paranji* and *chachvon* only started to emerge after the 1860s and 1870s—and at least a few *mursaks* were still in use as late as 1910. (See M. A. Bikzhanova, "Mursak—starinnaia verkhniaia odezhda uzbechek g. Tashkenta," *Trudy AN Tadzhikskoi SSR* 120 (1960): 47–53.) In 1917, moreover, most of the Muslim women who wore veils in Turkistan came from relatively affluent urban families. The full horsehair-and-cotton ensemble discussed here became a national emblem of the Uzbek people only later, after 1927. It appears to have spread into rural areas, and into lower-class families, largely as a response to the *hujum* and its explicit assault on local cultural practices.

22. For more details, see Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 347–52.

23. Shodier Mutahharkhonughlu, "Chodradagi aellar," *Movarounakhr musulmonlari*, no. 1 (1992): 9–13. For a Western account, see Carol J. Williams, "Taking an Eager Step Back to Islam," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1995.

7. *The Wedding Feast: Living the New Uzbek Life in the 1930s*

Marianne Kamp

Rural Uzbeks began to experience rapid change in the 1930s, when the Soviet Union initiated collectivization of agriculture. Collectivization ended private ownership of land, and it destroyed much of the traditional village hierarchy as the state arrested and exiled many wealthy landowners and members of the Muslim clergy. More broadly, farmers became farm-laborers, while collective farms began investing in institutions such as schools and clinics to benefit their members. Modern, Soviet education started to become widely available, and it spread new ideas and new life goals among rural Uzbek youth. Girls in Xorazm [Khorezm] province (in Uzbekistan's northwest), who ten years earlier would have been veiled in a *paranji* and *chachvon*,¹ and who would have been illiterate, now not only could attend primary school (if their parents permitted them), but might even aspire to a career outside the village.

The writers for *Bright Life*, a magazine for Uzbek women and girls, wanted to inspire their readers to seek education and become employed outside their homes, both goals that the Soviet state and the Communist Party promoted. But *Bright Life's* authors were also trying to negotiate the complexities of combining modern, working life for women with Uzbek values. How could a young Uzbek woman fulfill the Soviet goals of education and socially useful labor while also fulfilling Uzbek expectations that she would respect elders, marry according to her parents' wishes, and be loyal to parents and to her community?

In "The Wedding Feast," published in 1937, the heroine, Gulshad, is a young woman from a small village in Xorazm, whose story is designed to model for readers how to balance modern Soviet values with Uzbek family and community expectations. Gulshad's story also encompasses the political struggles of the time, echoing the Communist Party's interpretation of class conflict, and demonstrating to readers the average person's need to be vigilant against enemies of the Soviet state. The year 1937