

'Uzbek Speculators' Behind the Front Line. A Firmly Rooted Russian Colonial Stereotype Versus the Soviet 'Friendship of Peoples'

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In my paper, I try to analyze the historical context of archival documents from the second half of 1943, where traces of the conspiracy theory that Uzbek workers were trading their food rations can be found. Accusations of trade and speculation in food drew heavily from the pre-revolutionary stereotypes and conspiracy theories from the period of the Revolution and the Civil War. Increasing theft and embezzlement in the trading network of food, textiles, and manufactured goods, the misuse of state and kolkhoz property, and conspicuous consumption were also reported from Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in the early 1940s. Some premises for the conspiracy theory about the Uzbek propensity to speculate and conduct bazaar trade remained valid until the early 1980s, as seen in the so-called 'cotton affair', which triggered a series of rumors and images about Uzbek nepotism and mafia structures among the Soviet public. I argue that this rather represents traditional work preferences among Central Asian populations, where it possible to identify one of the sources of the role of a 'provider of stereotypes' played by the region as a periphery of the Russian/Soviet Empire.

Key words: Soviet 'Friendship of Peoples', 'Great Patriotic War' mythology, stereotyping Central Asians, obstacles in building the 'imagined community' of the Soviet Union

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The Uzbeks (...) are fighting for the ancient Russian city of Rzhev, and for them it is their hometown. I saw a Russian village near the Volga, liberated by the Uzbeks. (...) Together with other peoples from our homeland, they are defending life, breath, bread, dreams, and freedom. (...) There are many Uzbeks among the defenders of Leningrad. (...) The soldier Tashtamirov is bravely fighting for our northern capital.

He says: "We will not give Leningrad to the accursed Germans. We Uzbeks are friends of Russians. Our friendship is solid, like the rocks of my native Pamir. (sic!) (...) Old people and children in flourishing Uzbekistan know: if a German does not rob their villages, this is because Russians and Ukrainians, Kazakhs and Tatars, far to the west, are repelling the attacks of an evil enemy. (...) Ferghana is green – as green as paradise. Heavy clusters are poured with the juice of joy. The snow of cotton fields promises fabulous wealth. The edge of life, hot sun and cold water, round melons, apples, sheep like clouds. Everything there is created for happiness. (...) And we have one homeland – from the Carpathians to Ferghana.

Ilya Ehrenburg, *Uzbeks*, "Krasnaya zvezda" ("Red Star"), No 247, 20. 10. 1942

The newspaper fragment quoted above is an example of Soviet propaganda typical for the period of the 'Great Patriotic War'. In this case, the role of the 'war correspondent' was played by the famous Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, whose task it was to utilize the myth of the 'Friendship of Peoples' (*druzhba narodov*), promoted by Soviet propaganda as the unifying factor between the various ethnic groups living in the Soviet state. The reality he created in the article for propaganda purposes is, however, in stark contrast to the image of distrust underpinned by stereotypes, accusations, and prejudices that emerges from Soviet documents.

Both of these components – stereotypes and archival documents – are extremely important, as classic models of Soviet colonialism rarely referred to analyses of stereotypes held by the conquerors against the subjugated and made little use of archival materials, focusing instead on the Soviet press, official publications and ethnographic materials. The first to use the term 'colonialism' in reference to the Soviet state was Walter Kolarz. In his view, this 'colonialism' was based on political and cultural domination, economic exploitation and a changing demographic situation in the country in the favor of Russians at the expense of non-Russian peoples. Such a policy, he argued, was a continuation of the Russification practices of the tsarist regime, to which the sovietization methods of the new authorities were added (Kolarz, 1953, 1964). For Hugh Seton-Watson, Russification was merely a tool of Communist social engineering, while the Soviet authorities, in his view, did not seek in their imperialist drive to turn non-Russians into Russians at any cost (Seton-Watson, 1964). Other researchers have considered Central Asia's colonial dependence on Moscow primarily in economic terms, introducing the concepts of 'internal colonialism' and 'welfare colonialism', among others (Rywkin, 1984b; Burg, 1986; Byrbaeva, 2005: 84–105). As Gerhard Simon points out, a particular facet of Soviet colonialism in comparison to others, which tended to try not to change established traditions, was the top-down implementation of social revolution (Simon, 1984). However, as other Central Asian specialists have emphasized, the Soviet authorities annihilated local elites who could sympathize with this social revolution. As a consequence, the old tsarist-era divisions between 'enlightened carriers of civilization' from Europe and 'backward natives' survived in the Soviet era (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1983; Rywkin, 1987). However, one searches in vain for information about any inter-ethnic conflicts, mutual animosities,

or long-lived stereotypes in Soviet ethnography. In general, ethnography as the ‘science of ethnos’ and a branch of historical science on the evolution of societies, made inter-ethnic relations in the USSR taboo. It was only possible to talk about them in the ritualized language of propaganda, to study the ‘ethnogenesis’ of nations of the children of Soviet nationality policy, to develop ‘ethnos theory’ while pretending not to see any conflicts, or to contemplate the ‘dialectics of assimilation’ or admire the ‘national flourishing’ of one group or another. Ethnographers did not provide Soviet decision-makers with any expertise, so the developments accompanying the collapse of the USSR took the authorities completely by surprise (Karmysheva, 1954, 1960; Gubaeva, 1987; Oshanin, 1954; Skalnik, 1990; Zhdanko, 1974; van Meurs, 2001; Laruelle, 2005; Abashin, 2014; Sukhareva, 1955: 41; Chichlo, 1985). Only Olga Brusina’s article on the multinational villages on the border of the Uzbek and Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republics, written amid an atmosphere of growing inter-ethnic tensions, proved to be a breakthrough (and much overdue) in this regard. The article broke with certain constraints and recognized the problems arising from the presence of descendants of forced displaced persons (Brusina, 1990). The only chance to find this type of information on inter-ethnic tensions concerning the Soviet period is in archival documents.

In my paper, I try to analyze the historical context of data provided in previously unknown archival documents of the Kirov district party committee (now in the Russian Federation) from the second half of 1943. A note from August 1943 describes the situation of 2,170 people, of whom 895 were Uzbeks and the rest Turkmen, mobilized to work in industry, railways and construction in the Kirov region (*oblast’*) of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, listing abuses and shortcomings attributable to the local leadership. Accusations were also made against the district authorities of the Uzbek and Turkmen SSR that they ‘treated lightly’ (*nieseriozno otnieslis’*) the issue of sending mobilized Uzbeks and Turkmen to particular oblasts in the northern part of Russia, and specifically that they did not provide them with the necessary quantities of warm clothing and footwear or subject them to medical examinations, which resulted in many falling sick and being unable to work. Regardless of these charges, the picture that emerges from the note is that of two parallel worlds governed by completely different cultures, a picture far removed from the propaganda portrayals of Soviet unity in the face of war. ‘An absolute majority of Uzbeks and Turkmen is illiterate (*niegramotnye*), does not speak Russian at all, represents a low level of socio-cultural development (*nizkii kul’turnyi uroven’*), cultivates basic living habits’, **and in this respect differs significantly from other workers.** For example, they refused to eat many of the dishes prepared in the canteen, did not like going to the baths or changing underwear, did not use spoons, and drank their soup from a bowl. Further, they displayed an unhealthy state of ‘moral and political awareness’ (*moral’no-politicheskoe sostoyanie*), and as a result they tried to avoid work at all costs and simulate illnesses just to return home (GASPIKO: 79)¹. In addition, **they made strenuous efforts**

1 GASPIKO – State Archive for Social and Political History of the Kirov Region (now The Central State Archive of the Kirov Region).

to live in separate barracks, away from the Russian workers. Thus, in the present instance we are dealing with two 'urban spaces', especially as, according to the Russians, Central Asians have 'dirt in their barracks' and 'do not respect hygiene' (GASPIKO: 80). Most importantly, we also come across traces of conspiracy theories that were used to explain various abuses. We read about one of the local secretaries of the party organization and the 'workers' avant-garde' at the railway station where the Uzbeks worked, who claimed that they 'live well, have several thousand rubles buried, **trade their food rations** (*poluchennye produkty oni prodayut*) and deliberately bring themselves to a state of exhaustion (*umyshlenno sebya istoshchayut*) in order to return home more quickly' (GASPIKO: 82).

Soviet Central Asia: a Colonial Periphery in the early 1940s?

The territorial division (*razmezhevaniye*) of Central Asia was based on the assumption that the region's three main nationalities, the Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Kazakhs (called 'Kyrgyz' until 1925) had not yet reached an appropriate stage of political and economic development, but that the creation of 'tailored' ethno-territorial units would greatly accelerate this process. In June 1924, a special committee of the Orgbiuro of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) met to make territorial deliniations of the new Central Asian republics. However, the borders of only two republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, were drawn out at the time as there represented the most promising 'projects' in terms of nationality and economy. Uzbeks and Turkmen, as 'nations *in spe*', were singled out for cotton cultivation (Zelenski, Vareikis, 1924; Hirsch, 2005: 70–98, 160–175; Khalid, 2015: 257–290).

Historians tend to agree that in the pre-war period most Central Asians were still rather unfamiliar with the main assumptions of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Bolshevik-Stalinist vocabulary. On the other hand, the same could probably be said of other areas of the USSR during this period. At the time, the Central Asian *nomenklatura* was often described by European Bolsheviks – who treated their comrades as 'second-rate communists' – as 'politically and alphabetically illiterate'. But in this case, too, one would have to consider whether such a label was not applied to them by Bolsheviks from the European part of Russia as part of their competition for influence. In any case, little doubt exists that mass education in the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs continued to be relatively rudimentary, and few Central Asian Muslims knew Russian at all. For some researchers, available archival evidence suggests that despite collectivization, purges among the elite and the first deportations, Uzbek and Turkmen social life had changed far less by 1941 than Moscow was ready to admit, despite the fact that numerous (albeit chaotic) propaganda campaigns targeting local traditions had been carried out in the preceding years, accompanied simultaneously by the successful fostering of Uzbek and Turkmen nationhood. For others, however, the entrenchment of a cotton monoculture in the region meant being

subjected to full control by the Soviet state (although this control was more political and cultural than social). Events following Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR turned Central Asia into a less distant territorial periphery (the occupation of the Western Soviet borderlands by the Germans, evacuations, mobilization, etc.), but left its status as a distant cultural phenomenon. In the first months following the German invasion, the Red Army was still a predominantly Slavic institution. Uzbekistan Party leaders expressed concern that 'the war is not being felt much in Tashkent', while the local population, in an information vacuum regarding what was actually going on in the rest of the Soviet Union, complained about the poor supply of bread. Such a situation was strongly conducive to the revival of various conspiracy theories. In addition, rumors made the rounds – and were passed on to the local population – that Soviet citizens evacuated from the Western part of the country to Tashkent and Central Asia enjoyed privileged status (Lynn Edgar, 2004: 261–263; Northrop, 2004: 314–343; Keller, 2001: 247–255; Manley, 2009: 84–85; Khalid, 2015: 65f). The evacuation fueled mutual distrust between the newcomers and local Uzbeks. Party communiqués reported that Europeans were getting ready to flee from the region should the Soviet system collapse, thus feeding speculation that 'the Uzbeks will slaughter the Russians and Jews'. The Polish-Jewish writer Aleksander Wat noted that Europeans feared that the Uzbeks were *'preparing for an uprising. The Russians, the Jews, the fugitives, the refugees – everybody was expecting a bloodbath'*. The wartime anti-Semitism that was rife in Tashkent and the Soviet Union at large, and which only developed further in the post-war period, gave birth to the concept of the 'Tashkent Front', a place where Jews hid during the conflict instead of taking part in the 'Great Patriotic War' (Manley, 2009: 229, 267–269; Stronski, 2011: 121).

On the other hand, 'European' war memoirs and numerous archival reports provide a sense of the animosity felt toward Uzbeks by newcomers because of their alleged wealth and the abundance of food that they had at their disposal – even though Party communiqués indicated that during these difficult years most Uzbeks were just as hungry as their non-Uzbek neighbors. Antipathy towards Central Asians increased, however, because many Slavic residents of the city and new arrivals believed that the indigenous population controlled food supplies and took advantage of the situation to sell goods at bazaars at exorbitant prices (Stronski, 2011: 124).

Generally, during the early stage of the German-Soviet war, Tashkent was in an information vacuum, where no one knew what was actually happening in the Soviet Union. Therefore all residents of Tashkent, both indigenous and migrant, being unsure of the information provided by the state, were left to the mercy of rumors, including panicked reports of an imminent attack on Uzbekistan aimed at transforming it into a British colony. In those days, the traditional Soviet obsession with secrecy, compounded by the war situation, clashed not only with the importance of communicating to the population what was occurring in the distant border regions, but also with the urgent need of building up popular support for the war (Stronski, 2011: 74).

Tashkent, the City of Bread and Dirt

Returning to the documents which I have cited above, we find in them many motifs, themes, literary topoi and prejudices against Central Asian Muslims that were born even in the pre-revolutionary period. In tsarist Russian Turkestan, for example, dirt and disease played an important role as the primary tropes in the colonial discourse. Clean 'European' city districts (e.g. in Tashkent) juxtaposed with the dirty, unsanitary, and densely populated 'native' Muslim neighborhoods (*mahallas*), characterized by narrow streets and murky canals, were one of the leading topics in the narrative of the 'Russian civilizing mission'. Traditional Central Asian 'dirtiness' and 'lack of hygiene' among local Muslims also evoked associations with disease (Sahadeo, 2007: 85–87; *Iz putevykh*, 1902; *Ko dnu*, 1890). A similar approach may be encountered in Soviet times. Soviet architects and city officials spoke negatively of the disorderliness of the winding streets of the Old Town sections of Tashkent to such an extent that the dust in these streets and the single-storey 'mud' homes lining them became the defining characteristics of historic Central Asian urban centers. Propaganda portrayed these traditional homes with their enclosed courtyards as prisons for women. Soviet officials also decried the neighborhood community *hauzes* (water tanks) as a breeding ground for disease (Stronski, 2011: 6).

At the same time, the proficiency of Central Asians in trade and business proved to be probably one of the most traumatizing experiences shared by Russian colonial society. Despite all the support shown by the colonial authorities to Russian companies and businesses, local Muslim shopkeepers in the streets and bazaars of Tashkent impressed many newcomers and visitors. As a result, Russian officials and military staff relied on the local population for basic goods. In this regard, Russian colonial mythology tended to depict the business success of Central Asian Muslims through various anti-Semitic clichés. The local settled population, called 'Sarts', allegedly resembled Jews in their 'passion for trade' and 'love of money' on the one hand, and 'cowardice, indolence, effeminacy, distrust, laziness, social conservatism' accompanied by 'weakness of spirit' on the other (Sahadeo, 2007: 89–91; Rohoziński, 2014: 641–644; Abašin, 2007). In turn, the abuses of the local colonial administration led the prominent Russian writer and satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin to formulate the socio-political metaphor of the 'Gentlemen from Tashkent' (*Gospoda tashkentsy*). '*Tashkent is a land that is all over the place where they are beating their teeth in*' – it is a symbol of moral degradation:

Tashkent (...) is a classic land of rams, which are distinguished by the fact that they are eager to be sheared, and after being shaved they grow again at an astonishing rate. Who will shear them? –They don't care, because they know that grooming is inevitable in their lives. (...) True Tashkent builds its edifices on the customs and heart of man. (...) The true Tashkent places its edifices in man's customs and heart. Anyone who sees in his neighbor's hearth not a fenced fortress but a field for poaching, comes from Tashkent; anyone who sees in his neighbor's physiognomy not

an image of God but a threshing floor that can be threshed with his fists at any time, comes from Tashkent; anyone who, without any inhibition, pushes his neighbor around like a soulless thing, who sees in him only material for satisfying all kinds of desires, comes from Tashkent.

(Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1970: 27).

What is important to note, from the times of the disastrous famines in the Volga region of 1891–1922 and 1921–1922, the image of ‘Tashkent, the City of Bread’ (*Tashkent – gorod khlebny*), from the story by Aleksandr Neverov, was quite current. In 1916–1917, war refugees sought safety in Central Asia, causing the city to become a haven for starving Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war and the desperately poor, many of whom arrived in Central Asia with visions of Tashkent as the ‘City of Bread,’ a place with ample food supplies. The novel written by Neverov in the early 1920’s about the journey of a young boy from the famine-stricken Volga region to Tashkent in search of bread was adapted into a popular children’s book and translated into Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew. As a result, in 1941–1942 Tashkent was surrounded by a magical aura as the destination for evacuated persons and a legendary source of food (Manley, 2009: 141–142; Stronski, 2011: 29).

Significantly, however, during the crucial period of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, such perceptions led to an eruption of violence that was fueled by accusations, and even conspiracy theories, and, as Marco Buttino shows, the struggle for power in former Russian Turkestan tended to boil down to a simple struggle for food (Buttino, 2003). Following the failed spring harvest in 1917, food supplies in Tashkent became scarce. Rumors began to spread among the European population that local Muslims had hidden substantial stocks of food. In consequence, a women’s food riot broke out in July 1917. Police, soldiers, and the male population joined the riot, attacking Central Asian merchants and seizing their supplies. Russian railway workers and soldiers began regular requisitions among the Muslim population at Tashkent railway station in late August. This was the genesis and at once the background of the events that later came to be known as ‘October in September.’ Everything started on September 11–12, when the Russian soldiers in Tashkent were experiencing intense hunger. The food situation in the region was disastrous. Meanwhile, the Muslim festival of Qurban-Bayram was approaching, and the natives flocked to the bazaar. The villagers from the surrounding *kishlaks* (villages) came to the city to sell their rams for slaughter and buy rice, spices and flour. When they went laden with goods to the railway station in the evening in order to return to their villages, the soldiers first watched them enviously, and then surrounded the crowd and began to requisition food. This continued for the next few days, and a rally was also held against ‘speculators.’ General Pavel Korovichenko, trusted by Kerensky, was sent by the Provisional Government and managed to suppress the rebellion and restore order. Despite this, however, a fresh wave of spontaneous requisitions swept across Tashkent in late October, lasting until December. In the meantime, frustrated soldiers murdered General Korovichenko, who had been imprisoned (Sahadeo, 2007: 193–201; Park, 1957: 3–58).

The Urgent Need to Forge the 'Soviet Friendship of Peoples'

Increasing theft and embezzlement in the trading network of food, textiles, and manufactured goods, the misuse of state and kolkhoz property, and conspicuous consumption were also reported from the Uzbek SSR in the early 1940s; this was probably an expression of the mutual animosity and rivalry between Uzbeks and Russians in the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party. In fact, the issue was also a consequence of the USSR's domestic policy regarding the Uzbek SSR. According to the Party Control Commission's report from 1941 on the situation in the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party, there was an 'unhealthy climate' and fierce competition 'between Russians and Uzbeks'. The Party Second Secretary, Alexander Kudriavtchev, accused the Uzbek leadership of embezzlement, theft, and the concentration of powers (accusations that were also made in other Soviet republics). It is worth noting that in the 1940s Stalin often sided with the Uzbek leaders against the Russians sent by the Kremlin to the republic, and the Uzbek leadership had quite a lot of freedom in the selection of the Party and administrative staff. And when in 1943 the First Secretary of the Uzbek Party, Usman Yusupov, reported increasing theft and embezzlement in the trading network of food, textiles, and manufactured goods, proposing to initiate an on-site NKVD investigation (through the so-called *troika*), his motion was rejected by Molotov and Mikoyan, who suggested the case should come under the all-Union Prosecutor General Stalin, however, sided with the Uzbek leader (Norling, 2017: 50–52).

The need of the moment was such that the Soviet authorities could not afford traditional distrust towards the loyalty of Central Asian Muslim recruits. In response to disastrous losses in personnel, military and Communist Party officials desperately needed new volunteers and conscripts from the entire Soviet Union. Party reports from Tashkent, however, highlighted Uzbeks as avoiding the military draft, indicating that there was particular concern that Central Asians did not understand the need to defend the Soviet Union's distant borders and that Uzbeks could be a weak link in the defense of the USSR. German bombs were not falling on the Central Asian territory, leading Party officials to believe even more firmly that local residents did not have the same understanding of the threat as, for example, Kievans, Muscovites, Leningraders, or Ukrainian and Belorussian villagers. Nevertheless, a significant portion of new young Red Army soldiers came from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics in the later stages of the war. Prior to this, many of their countrymen were forcibly deported to factories in Russia. The mobilization of young men from Central Asia to labor battalions created a dangerous analogy with the previous war and the outbreak of the native uprising in 1916 (Stronski, 2011: 75–77; Pierce, 1960: 274–293; Allworth, 1990: 160; Caroe, 1953: 101; Hayit, 1956: 29f; Brower, 1996).

In the end, the situation described in the above-mentioned documents shows the depth of the social changes that took place in the USSR in the months following the

Second World War. It is absolutely true – as many researchers have argued – that the so-called ‘Great Patriotic War’ proved to be a turning point for the population of Soviet Central Asia and its broader integration into the ‘imagined community’ of the Soviet Union. Soviet military authorities mobilized the entirety of Central Asia’s administrative and cultural resources to conduct an efficient propaganda campaign targeting local recruits. Warfare transformed the young men from remote areas of Central Asia who served in the Red Army in various ways: Uzbek, Kazakh and Turkmen soldiers learned Russian and adapted to Soviet front-line culture, including the Soviet war practice of writing letters to unknown girls. Additionally, the adoption of evacuated orphans from the European part of the USSR by local Muslim families had a huge impact on the social reality of Soviet Central Asia. In the post-war period, the Red Army began to play the role of an institution educating, socializing, shaping the attitudes of Soviet patriotism among Central Asian Muslims, and integrating them with Soviet society (Shin, 2015; Kamp, 2006: 222; Keller, 2020: 205–206; Marat, 2010: 29–31; Tasar, 2011).

Tashkent, Once Again the City of Corruption

Nevertheless, some of the premises for the conspiracy theory regarding the Uzbek propensity to speculate and conduct bazaar trade remained valid, as illustrated by the so-called ‘cotton affair’ of the early 1980s, which triggered a series of rumors and images about Uzbek nepotism and mafia structures among the Soviet public. Several books and dissertations, as well as a large number of articles have been published on the local ‘clans’ or regional ‘solidarity networks’ allegedly shaping politics in Soviet and post-Soviet Uzbekistan, but none of them have utilized primary archival sources (Selnick, 1984; Rywkin, 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Carlisle, 1986; Rumer, 1989; Critchlow, 1991; Ro’i, 1995; Collins, 1999, 2006; Bailey Carlisle, 2000; Jones Luong, 2002; Roy, 2005). Nicklas Norling, however, in his brilliant paper based on an abundance of materials from the RGANI and RGASPI archives in Moscow,² and also on the documentation of the party Control Commission, has shown convincingly that regional and family-based loyalties were hardly a significant problem in Soviet Uzbekistan (in contrast, for example, to Tajikistan, where nepotism was very evident in the policies of the republic’s authorities), which was nevertheless condemned by the Soviet press and Kremlin party officials from 1984 onwards as the most corrupt, pre-modern and nepotistic part of the USSR when compared to other Soviet republics. It is worth noting that the densely populated Uzbek SSR contained 60 percent of Central Asia’s agricultural lands and generated 70 percent of the region’s total economic profits. According to the Party Control Commission, these profits were misused, as the local party leadership organized lavish ‘banquets’ and built

2 RGANI – Russian State Archive of Modern History; RGASPI – Russian State Archive for Social and Political History.

‘prestigious structures’ instead of focusing on ‘social development’ (Norling, 2017: 10, 17, 19, 36, 81, 99–104, 124; Staples, 1993; Cucciola, 2017).

The prejudices associated with the ‘cotton affair’ – as Paul Stronski aptly shows – were well established socially, among others at the grassroots level. In the mindset of many local Russian officials, the Central Asian bazaar was ‘worse’ than a capitalist company trading on a larger scale or one of the small private shops that Soviet trade institutions had liquidated in Russia and the European part of the USSR. The Soviet press often depicted the Central Asian market in an aura of scandal, as a filthy place where prices were unregulated and extremely high. Vendors were regularly termed ‘criminals’ or ‘representatives of the shadow economy’ (*teneviki*), who cheated both the state and their customers. In the Uzbek SSR, where the majority of Russians and Slavs lived in the cities and Uzbeks were usually rural collective farmers, class, racial, religious and ethnic antagonisms converged in the Central Asian marketplace. The bazaar was ‘bad’ not just because it was a remnant of the capitalist past. The Slavic residents – mostly engineers, members of the intelligentsia and factory workers – depended on the bazaar to a greater extent than did their Muslim counterparts, who often had courtyard gardens (*priusadiebnye uchastki*) and extended families near the city who could help secure food. The Party ideologues, local officials, and some city residents viewed the traditional marketplaces negatively not only because they remained a ‘symbol of capitalism’ but because they were a visible sign of Uzbek supremacy in a region where Central Asians had traditionally controlled the food supply, which in turn purportedly made life in the socialist state more difficult (Stronski, 2011: 51f).

Norling is certainly right to conclude that the strong belief in the existence of nepotism, bribery and embezzlement of republican resources by mafia-like ‘clans’ as a key driver of local politics in Uzbekistan was a myth (Norling, 2017: 121–122). I disagree, however, with his ‘archivaly-biased’ opinion that the myth is based only on the ‘accumulation of initially unsupported claims.’ As Nancy Lubin demonstrates in her excellent study based on fieldwork carried out in Soviet Central Asia, the reluctance of the local population to work in heavy industry and ‘modern’ areas of the economy tended to be one of the key factors in the social development processes occurring among Uzbeks during the Soviet era. Such a distrust of the force of social ‘modernization’ implemented by the Soviet authorities was also accompanied by low social mobility and the maintenance of the ‘traditional’ and ‘noble’ areas of human activity such as agriculture and bazaar trading (Lubin, 1985; Akyildiz, Carlson, 2013; Rywkin, 1984a). Similar observations about the ‘low level of social mobility of the indigenous population’ (*nizkaia mobilnost’ korenogo naselenia*) could also be found in studies of Soviet sociology of the period (Zyuzin, 1983, 1986).

And, in all probability, this is the traditional Central Asian distrust towards some aspects of the Russian / Soviet modernization accompanied by the trade skills, where we can identify one of the real sources of the myth shared by Russian / Slav power circles. If such was indeed the case, then we would be close to the accusations put forward in 1917 and 1943. In all the examined instances: of the ‘September in

October', of charges of speculation from the period of the 'Great Patriotic War', or of the 'cotton affair' of the 1980s, Central Asia, being a region, where a peculiar Soviet colonial 'dual society' functioned, according to Adeb Khalid's term, in which urban-based Europeans dominated the industrial-technical sector, while Muslim natives were mainly rural communities (Khalid, 2015: 392). The boundary between the two societies was marked precisely by, among other things, surprisingly enduring mutual stereotypes, which the intense Soviet propaganda of 'Friendship of Nations' during World War II and later could not fully overcome.

ABBREVIATIONS

GASPIKO – State Archive for Social and Political History of the Kirov Region (now The Central State Archive of the Kirov Region)
RGANI – Russian State Archive of Modern History
RGASPI – Russian State Archive for Social and Political History
f. (*fond*) – folio; op. (*opis'*) – series; d. (*delo*) – dossier; l. (*linii*) – sheets

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

GASPIKO f. 1209, op. 9, d. 101, l. 79–84, 107–109 *Spravka o materialno-bytovym i politicheskom obsluzhivanii uzbekov i turkmenov, rabotayushchikh v predpriyatiakh v Kirovskoi oblasti* (1943)

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