

STALINIST POLICIES, INDIGENOUS AGENTS, AND PEASANT ACTORS:
NEGOTIATING COLLECTIVIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN, 1929-1932

by

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Peasant experiences of agricultural collectivization in Uzbekistan followed an overarching pattern familiar from studies of collectivization elsewhere in the USSR but simultaneously bore the deep imprint of Central Asia's unique history of Soviet rule since the revolution. State control remained weak in the Uzbek village, and Uzbek officials at the local level were forced to mediate between pressure from the central authorities and pressure from traditional village norms. As a result, the contours of collectivization in Uzbekistan were defined as much by local specificities and face-to-face relationships as by central policy. Uzbek peasants initially engaged in mass resistance to collectivization, drawing on a tradition of comprehensive opposition to Soviet rule on grounds of culture, Islam, nation, and village solidarity. But despite their apparent intransigence, over time Uzbek peasants found broad opportunities for compromise and collaboration with the state within the malleable framework of power and affiliation in Stalin-era Central Asia.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: THE SOVIET PROJECT IN UZBEKISTAN	1
Upheaval and Indigenization: Rooting Soviet Power in Uzbekistan, 1917-1927	5
Assault on Peasant Solidarity: Land Reform, 1925-26.....	7
II. COLLECTIVIZATION IN PRACTICE.....	16
“Unhealthy Competition” in a Backward Region: Strategies of Collectivization in Uzbekistan.....	17
“Excesses and Distortions” or Silent Subversion? Implementation and the Problem of Local Cadres.....	22
III. DYNAMICS OF PEASANT RESISTANCE.....	35
The View from Above: Chronology, Scale, and Forms of Peasant Response	37
The View from the Ground: “Enemies of Soviet Power” in Mazar	51
IV. PATTERNS OF PEASANT AFFILIATION	64
Drawing and Redrawing the Bounds of Community: The Village, Women, Islam, and Ethnicity	66
The Limits of Solidarity and the Limits of Collaboration: The Class Principle and Peasant Participation.....	82
V. CONCLUSION.....	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Administrative Division of the Uzbek SSR, 1929-1938.....	18

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Mass demonstrations by okrug, February 1 – March 17, 1930	46
2. Shift in urban and rural populations of Central Asian republics and the USSR as a whole from the 1926 census to the 1939 census	93

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE SOVIET PROJECT IN UZBEKISTAN

If one were to attempt to quantify the relative human suffering that Stalinist collectivization inflicted in the various Soviet republics for the sake of comparison, the experience of the Uzbek republic would not stand out. Uzbekistan escaped both the worst repressions and the deadly famines that afflicted the Ukraine and some of Russia's grain-growing regions. It was not even the most devastated of the Central Asian republics; that title almost certainly belongs to Kazakhstan, which lost over a million citizens to the famine that followed in the wake of collectivization and the sedentarization of its native peoples.¹ Nor was Uzbekistan the locus of a uniquely violent or protracted movement of peasant resistance. Central Asia's most violent and categorical answer to collectivization, the armed bands of so-called "basmachi" guerillas – a legacy of the years of revolution and civil war – asserted themselves most vigorously in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, and only occasionally touched the territory of the Uzbek SSR. All of these elements – repression, resistance, hunger, and violence – did emerge out of collectivization in Uzbekistan, sometimes even on a mass scale. But the significance of the Uzbek case is not as a superlative example of state cruelty and peasant victimization, though these features, too, were never wholly absent. Instead, collectivization in Uzbekistan exemplified how a centrally defined, all-union policy could both follow a common Soviet pattern and bear the indelible mark of local specificities.

¹ Niccolo Pianciola, "Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazak Herdsmen, 1928-1934," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 45, no. 1-2 (2004): 137.

The existing literature dealing directly with the issue of collectivization in the sedentary regions of Central Asia remains very limited. A few Soviet-era monographs, such as the works of A.Iu. Ibragimova and R.Kh. Aminova, provide essential background into state policy and its implementation in Uzbekistan, as well as a broad overview of the changes Soviet power wrought in the Uzbek countryside.² Both, however, tend to downplay the scale and long-term roots of peasant resistance. English-language scholarship on Uzbekistan has tended to focus on the experiences of the 1920s and on the cultural sphere in particular, with research by Gregory Massell and Douglas Northrop highlighting the campaign for the emancipation of Uzbek women, and Shoshana Keller addressing the state's assault on Islam.³ Each of these works discusses issues of transformative state policy and peasant resistance, and each raises the question of Uzbekistan's relative level of integration into the Soviet system, but the specifics of the rural environment and the experience of collectivization are addressed only in passing. Within the Central Asian region more generally, works by Niccolo Pianciola and Adrienne Edgar have discussed the impact of collectivization in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, respectively; but these cases tend to reflect the specific experiences of nomadic communities, experiences not often shared by the historically sedentary Uzbeks.⁴

As a result, the most useful object of comparison is often the experience of collectivization in the agricultural regions of the Soviet Union more generally. The demands and

² A. Iu. Ibragimova, "Sotsialisticheskoe perestroistvo sel'skogo khoziaistva Uzbekistana," in *Ocherki istorii kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v soiuznykh respublikakh*, ed. V.P. Danilova (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963); R. Kh. Aminova, *Changes in Uzbekistan's Agriculture, 1917-1929*, trans. V.A. Epshtein and B.N. Lunkov (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1974).

³ Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001).

⁴ Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

priorities of state policy, the vagaries of local implementation, and the resulting upsurge in open peasant opposition that eventually settled into a pattern of provisional participation, together form a familiar narrative in a broader, Soviet history of collectivization, as described by scholars such as Lynne Viola and Sheila Fitzpatrick.⁵ Even in many of the details – the crest of resistance in spring of 1930, the tactics of sale and slaughter of livestock in anticipation of their collectivization, the appeals to village solidarity and religion, and the particular role of women in staging resistance, to name a few – the similarities are immediately striking. Yet such similarities can conceal as much as they clarify. The fact that peasants all over the Soviet Union reacted to similar pressures from the local authorities, who were in turn responding to similar instructions from the central state apparatus, doubtless explains a great deal in the similar outcomes of collectivization. But even apparently analogous phenomena in the Uzbek and the Russian cases might be rooted in radically different beliefs and perceptions. When Uzbek peasants concealed, sold, or destroyed their livestock to avoid collectivization, they would have been more likely to envision a parallel with the experience of Central Asian land reform just a few years earlier than with peasant resistance to collectivization on an all-union level. Or, to take another example, when Uzbek women participated in public displays of resistance, they were doing so within the context not only of a Central Asian and Islamic tradition of veiling and seclusion of women, but also of an active and ongoing conflict between Soviet policy and Uzbek society over the role of women and their participation in public life. What is lacking, then, is an interpretive framework that relates collectivization in Uzbekistan both to the Soviet experience more generally and to a longer-term history of the region. Without a grasp of this uniquely Uzbek framework of history, memory, and culture, it is impossible to understand collectivization as it would have been

⁵ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance & Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

understood both by Uzbek peasants and by local agents of state power, and thus to understand the motivations that variously led to practices of coercion, subversion, resistance, and collaboration.

Perhaps surprisingly, the characteristics of the Uzbek cultural and social environment, and especially its low level of integration and relatively weak state control through the beginning of the 1930s, resulted in neither a uniquely violent clash of state and society nor in a total inefficacy of state power during the collectivization campaign. Rather, it created a set of circumstances in which local institutions, local controversies, and the agency of individuals assumed a vital importance alongside central state policy in determining the shape that collectivization would take in Uzbekistan. The state's failure to define clear parameters for collectivization until several months into the campaign, as elsewhere in the USSR, made local authorities the engine of collectivization policy, guided only by a vague sense of what the center expected and demanded. These authorities were obliged not simply to follow direct orders, but to actively interpret the confusing and even contradictory signals issued from above and to act concretely based on general principles. But the survival in Uzbekistan of a village milieu with a dominant non-Soviet, Islamic, traditionalist culture, and the policies of native cadre promotion that placed individuals adhering to this culture in positions of power, created a competing pull on the loyalties and motivations of officials, giving both individual personalities and local social relationships a central position in molding the day-to-day contours of collectivization policy. Finally, these two competing hubs of authority and loyalty – the Soviet state and the Uzbek village – created an arena for individual action in which opportunities for resistance, subversion, co-optation, and collaboration were manifold. The terms of collectivization in Uzbekistan were shaped by the relationship between the state and the village that had developed over the course of the decade since the Soviet revolution, and collectivization in turn shaped this relationship, redrawing lines of power, opportunity, and affiliation among peasants and presenting state power

alternately as a hostile external force to be greeted with solidarity, as a source of inducements offering individual gain, and as a tool to be leveraged against other villagers.

Upheaval and Indigenization: Rooting Soviet Power in Uzbekistan, 1917-1927

Central Asia presented the Soviet state with a particularly acute case of the problem of balancing cultural revolution with security and stability.⁶ From the very beginning, the Soviet leadership tended to view Central Asia simultaneously as a backward periphery in need of revolutionary transformation and as a volatile border region warranting particular control and caution. The October Revolution of 1917 arrived in Central Asia from the outside and with an almost entirely Russian face, enforced by the Red Army and opposed by a violent basmachi resistance movement that was not subdued until 1924. In some regions resistance persisted even longer. The Bolsheviks found themselves precariously positioned over a primarily rural and agricultural society, steeped in Islamic structures of authority and tradition and languishing in a “feudal” stage of economic development, a milieu that seemed inhospitable to Communism even in comparison with the rest of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the state faced the immediate challenge of establishing its legitimacy as a non-colonial, revolutionary power by recruiting native cadres for positions of power from among the predominantly unsympathetic, illiterate, non-Russian speaking Uzbek population, a process known as *korenizatsiia*, or “indigenization.” This attempt to create an ethnically Uzbek administration meant, in the short term at least, promoting individuals who might be either underqualified or ideologically suspect to positions of power, raising difficulties for the state’s ability both to exert centralized control and to implement policy effectively.

⁶ Gregory Massell describes this problem as the tension between “heretical” and “legitimizing,” or revolutionary and governing, models of state action in Central Asia.

The unique challenges of rooting Soviet power in Central Asia made the 1920s, the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP), much more actively contested than they were in Russia, with social, cultural, and economic transformation rather than economic recovery resting at the basis of much of state policy. In the context of Uzbek history, collectivization would emerge not only as part of a union-wide attempt to transform the rural economy and the bases of peasant life, but also as part of a pattern of transformative state projects specific to the region – the land and water reforms of 1925-1926, the campaign for the unveiling of women beginning in 1927, and the periodic attacks on Islam and the influence of the clergy. Each of these attempts at transformation pitted state power and revolutionary ideology against existing Uzbek social relationships and ways of life, seeking points of access for the modernization and “Sovietization” of native society. As a result, each of these projects also engendered wide-ranging resistance.

The unveiling campaign, in particular, as Douglas Northrop describes, elicited a full “spectrum of resistance” within Uzbek society, encompassing rumor, gossip, and “mutterings on the street” at one extreme, and mass uprisings and violent attacks against unveiled women and Soviet activists at the other.⁷ State policymakers had hoped that by engaging the theoretically oppressed stratum of Islamic women as beneficiaries of Soviet power, they would gain a point of leverage for the transformation of Uzbek daily life, tradition, and even socioeconomic structures. But the newly installed Uzbek agents of Soviet power, the beneficiaries of “indigenization,” not only were reluctant to enforce the policies of unveiling and emancipation of women among their co-ethnics, but often even shunned such practices within their own families. The outcome of the state’s attacks on Islam and traditional standards of belief and behavior was, contrary to every hope of Soviet policymakers, a society that found a sense of ethno-cultural solidarity in resistance to state interference, becoming if anything less accessible to transformative impulses than before.

⁷ Northrop 177.

Not only had Uzbek attitudes toward the state hardened in response to the failed unveiling campaign, but large numbers of individuals had gained experience, whether as participants or witnesses, in many of the forms of resistance that would resurface during collectivization.

The Soviet leadership had hoped that its goals of pursuing the revolutionary transformation of traditional society and establishing a local base for Soviet power would be mutually reinforcing, but in practice the two seemed to negate one another. By attacking religion and tradition head-on, the state had alienated the populace without generating any corresponding benefit in tightened control. But if the attack on the veil and the haphazard closing of mosques clearly served to undermine Soviet authority in the Uzbek countryside, the results of the land reform were more complex, and as the project of the 1920s that most directly prefigured collectivization in Uzbekistan, it deserves special attention. A detailed examination of the mechanisms behind the land reform campaign will also provide insight into the channels of contact that existed between individual peasants and the central state in the years leading up to collectivization, shedding light on Soviet power as it was directly experienced within the Uzbek village.

Assault on Peasant Solidarity: Land Reform, 1925-26

Unlike in Russia, the peasants of Central Asia had not undertaken a broad, self-directed repartitioning of land holdings at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. Instead, in the Uzbek countryside of the 1920s, some Uzbek peasants still owned enough land that they used hired labor to work their fields, making them “exploiters” by the Bolshevik definition (usually referred to as “bais,” and later, during collectivization, as “kulaks”). Other peasants were landless or land-poor (“batraks” and “bedniaks”), and thus viewed by the Soviet state as potential allies. Between these two were the aptly named “middle peasants,” or “seredniaks.” These peasant “classes,” however,

remained only weakly differentiated, united by common religious and cultural practice more than they were divided by socio-economic status. This solidarity at the village level, as will become clear, was neither complete nor unconditional, but it presented a challenge both to the Marxist-Leninist ideology of class struggle and to the authority of the fledgling Soviet state, which sought a popular base of support in the countryside from which it could launch a modernizing attack on traditional social and economic structures. As a result, land reform was to a certain extent conceived as a “weapon in the hands of the Bolsheviks to be used for deepening and aggravating class struggle,” for undermining the power and influence of the landowning segment while mobilizing the poor as active participants in and beneficiaries of Soviet power.⁸

Beginning in December 1925, the Soviet state began to nationalize newly irrigated lands, Islamic *waqf* endowment properties, usually maintained by a member of the clergy, and lands above a certain maximum limit held by “exploiter elements,” for the purposes of redistributing them to poor and landless peasants.⁹ The confiscation and redistribution of land was primarily carried out through traveling land reform commissions, which, according to a Soviet source, “were mainly staffed by local workers of indigenous nationalities who had necessary experience and qualification.”¹⁰ One can only guess that individuals fitting this description were in relatively short supply, and that Russian workers played a role as well. But regardless of their nationality, these were outsiders, predominantly urbanites, who would sweep into a community, conduct an intensive campaign of meetings and agitation for confiscation of the lands from large holders, and then move on to the next village. As Alexander Park notes, this campaign, as one of the first

⁸ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 335.

⁹ Aminova 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

face-to-face encounters between Uzbek villagers and the urban agents of Soviet power, must have appeared to the peasants as a sort of “proletarian raid against the countryside.”¹¹

At the same time, local and predominantly peasant organizations were enlisted in support of the work of the land reform commissions. The Koshchi peasant union (from the Uzbek word meaning “ploughman”), established in 1920 as a voluntary activist organization for poor peasants, carried out agitational and mobilizational work in the countryside before and during the land reform campaign, acting as a conduit linking Uzbek peasants with Bolshevik ideas. But the union suffered from relatively weak penetration into rural Uzbekistan. For example, there were only 110 rural Koshchi cells scattered among the total 1,900 villages in Samarkand oblast in 1925.¹² Other opportunities for propagating state ideas and organizational methods among the peasantry came through rural reading rooms, “red tearooms” (a Sovietized version of the traditional Central Asian *chaikhana*), and agricultural credit cooperatives. These last held regular meetings in which poor peasants were invited to actively participate, and some did, eagerly addressing questions of “how to fight embezzlement and speculation, improve the assortment of goods obtained from the cooperatives, and offer better services to the poor farms.”¹³

Beyond these scattered activist institutions, whose primary task was to disseminate party ideology rather than to enforce party policy, there existed the actual governmental hierarchy of the Soviet state in Uzbekistan. The most important and most universal appendage of state power in the countryside was the *sel'sovet*, or rural soviet, essentially the basic governing institution at the village level. The *sel'sovet* constituted the face of Soviet rule in the countryside on a day-to-day basis, but it was far less ideologically or politically controlled than any of the institutions

¹¹ Park 342.

¹² Aminova 122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

listed above. After the 1925-26 elections, 84% of sel'sovet members were Uzbeks, predominantly of rural origin.¹⁴ Moreover, as party members complained, a disconcerting number of those elected were “alien elements,” meaning former professional traders, wealthy “exploiters,” or Islamic clergy, all of whom villagers continued to hold in high regard in spite of Soviet propaganda.¹⁵ According to the data of the later 1931 elections, which took place in the midst of collectivization, only 23.8% of sel'sovet members were Communist and only 34.4% were literate, numbers that may well have been lower during the 1920s.¹⁶ And even this far from ideal link with the central Soviet state arrived late in some regions; the sel'sovets took the place of traditional village “elders [*aksakaly*]” only at the end of 1925 in some areas, and in at least one village, no sel'sovet existed until 1928.¹⁷ Located above the sel'sovets in the Soviet hierarchy were a series of institutions at the level of the *raion*, or district, the most important of which (for the purposes of understanding collectivization) were the “district executive committees,” or *raiispolkomy* (RIKs). These, too, were staffed primarily by Uzbeks – in 1926, as much as 92.8% of the RIK membership consisted of “local nationalities,” presumably meaning both Uzbeks and the other Central Asian nationalities living within the republic's borders, though it is difficult to know how many of these individuals were peasants.¹⁸ In general, by the time of the land reform campaign, organs of Soviet power and ideology had come into existence and begun to make themselves felt in most Uzbek villages, but these institutions were at times only tenuously linked

¹⁴ D. Allamuradov, *Sovety v bor'be za pobedu sotsializma v Uzbekistane (1924-1937 gg.)* (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo “Fan,” 1970), 85.

¹⁵ Park 198.

¹⁶ Allamuradov 168.

¹⁷ Ibid., 81; D.A. Alimova, ed., *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka: kollektivizatsiia, raskulachivanie, ssylka, 1929-1955 gg: dokumenty i materialy* (Tashkent: Shark, 2006), t. 1, No. 32, 114.

¹⁸ Allamuradov 87.

to the central apparatus, and were hardly staffed by the sort of politically-minded, disciplined representatives that the state would have chosen under ideal circumstances.

All of these channels of state mobilization and control, from the influx of urban working-class agitators, to the more long-standing but still only shakily established voluntary associations, to the predominantly peasant local authorities, were enlisted in the task of implementing land reform and drawing in large-scale peasant participation. A description by scholar Alexander Park, assembled from various accounts in the Soviet press, conveys something of the atmosphere and impact of this campaign:

Local Soviets, Party agencies, and Koshchi organizations chorused demands for an early seizure of the landlords' land and organized peasants in preparation for it. The rural areas were deluged with posters and pamphlets. Agitators, usually in groups of fives, and often accompanied by native musicians and singers, traveled from village to village, stirring up smallholders, farmhands, and sharecroppers, and organizing "spontaneous" demonstrations of poor peasants against the landlords.¹⁹

Poor and landless peasants gathered at village meetings and, with the encouragement (or direct pressure) of state agents, produced resolutions in favor of confiscating the lands of large landowners, or *bais*. Land holdings were redistributed according to principles that were both beneficial to the poor and punitive toward "class enemies."

Predictably, the land reform campaign drew resistance, with tactics foreshadowing those that would grow to a mass scale during collectivization. In many cases, the *bais* attempted to escape the economic effects of the reform by disguising the amount of land they actually owned or selling off excess land in advance.²⁰ Often, however, opposition was framed in terms that extended beyond economics. The Islamic clergy spoke out against the land reform (Soviet sources imply they did so because they stood to suffer economically) as violating shariat law.

¹⁹ Park 340.

²⁰ Aminova 82.

One member of the clergy argued, “The land reform violates the right of property, which according to the teachings of Islam is inadmissible.”²¹ Others even threatened divine retribution for any peasants accepting the lands that had been confiscated by the Bolsheviks: “Tempted by the promise of an easy gain and spurning the laws of the shariat, the dekhkans [Central Asian peasants] demanded a land reform... but the time will come when those who have been given land will incur the divine punishment they deserve.”²² Aside from its religious protest, this statement is also interesting in its suggestion that peasants themselves were responsible for the land reform, a phenomenon discussed in more detail below.

In other cases, the calls for opposition came on ethnic and national, rather than religious grounds; the land reform was condemned as “the work of the hands of the Russians and Tatars, who are in power.”²³ The memory of basmachi resistance was occasionally invoked as a model for total opposition to the state, with groups of *bais* reportedly planning to “organize a basmachi gang and openly come out against Soviet power.”²⁴ Apparently, this was not entirely an idle threat. Resistance to the land reform, according to a Soviet source, “at times reached the level of armed clashes” and culminated in “basmachi raids in some parts of the [Samarkand] region.”²⁵ Finally, the *bais* made appeals to village solidarity in their attempts to discourage active participation by the other peasants. In one area, they turned to the “middle peasants” for support, arguing, “Today the Communists are robbing us but tomorrow they will do the same to you.”²⁶

²¹ A. Berelovich and V. Danilov, eds., *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK – OGPU – NKVD, 1918-1939: dokumenty i materialy v 4 tomakh* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), t. 2, No. 226, 470.

²² Aminova 85.

²³ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t.2, No. 226, 470.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Aminova, 90, 92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

Elsewhere they employed a combination of persuasion and coercion, threatening or actually carrying out acts of retribution against poor peasants involved in the reform. As a secret police report from November 1926 notes, such acts occurred “not uncommonly with the direct support of the Soviet apparatus,” indicating the extent to which the newly recruited local authorities, above all at the sel’sovet level, remained subject to the social control of the village milieu while simultaneously acting as the executors of the (often unpopular) policies of the central state.²⁷ Each of these relationships – of power and belief, of the village and the Soviet state, and of individuals within the village against one another – would be replayed and expanded in the conditions of agricultural collectivization.

Resistance was not the only consequence of land reform in the Uzbek countryside, however, nor even arguably the most important. After the land reform, according to Soviet statistics, the Uzbek peasant population broke down by class into 37.6% bedniaks, 61% seredniaks, and 1.4% bais, with the actual beneficiaries of the reform numbering about 66,000 bedniak and batrak households.²⁸ But the number of Uzbeks affected by the language, state power structures, and revised intra-village relationships that the land reform campaign had created and widely disseminated was undoubtedly much greater.²⁹ Soviet official observers evaluated the outcome of the land reform as “a growth in the class consciousness of the poor peasants,” even referring to cases in which the state’s *failure* to carry out land reform had elicited dissatisfaction from the bedniaks, up to the point of public protests.³⁰ Setting aside the Marxist-Leninist assumption that the poor peasants naturally constituted a class whose interests would inherently conflict with those of the bais, we are left with the sense that the idea of class as

²⁷ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 2, No. 226, 469.

²⁸ Aminova 101.

²⁹ Park 345.

³⁰ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 2, No. 214, 403-405.

defined by the state had suddenly, even if temporarily, assumed great importance among Uzbek peasants. The label “bedniak” designated a set of privileges with state power as their guarantor, while the label “bai” denoted an almost total lack of legal protections. This tight linkage between the language of class on the one hand and power on the other allowed these terms to rapidly gain currency among a rural population that had rarely divided itself on the basis of class in the past.³¹ This is not to argue that socio-economic differentiation did not exist prior to the 1925-26 land reform, or that peasants had been altogether “unconscious” of it. Rather, peasants had begun to grasp a new language for speaking with the state and, to a certain extent, had come to envision shared interests and the possibilities of individual advancement in a new way in the light of state policies.

While the language of class of the Soviet land reform campaign presented Uzbek peasants with a conceptual alternative to village unity and solidarity, however, the results of the campaign were generally viewed as a disappointment from the perspective of the state leadership. As Douglas Northrop notes, land reform had “yielded fewer dramatic shake-ups of the local social order than originally envisioned – and fewer beneficiaries who emerged with new land and therefore an undying gratitude to Soviet power.”³² Despite the readiness of some peasants to adopt the state’s language of class and to benefit from its attacks on the wealthy stratum of the rural population, the land reform had not created the large base of ideologically devoted or even strongly sympathetic peasants that the state had envisioned. Peasant participation in Soviet power remained partial and provisional, signaling the appropriation of state power for individual gain as often as acceptance of state authority. The idea that the land reform had successfully “destroyed

³¹ In fact, a parallel phenomenon occurred following the national delimitation in Central Asia, as the new national labels (Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, etc.), which had previously been of secondary importance as markers of identity, were adopted with startling speed when they became useful tools in framing inter-group struggles before the state. Francine Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” *Russia Review* 59, no. 2 (2000): 213-219.

³² Northrop 75.

the traditional foundations of village unity,” as Alexander Park argues, seems doubtful given the continued appeals to solidarity that marked peasant resistance to collectivization.³³ The unveiling campaign that began in 1927 grew out of attempts to redress this failure, as the party leadership pursued a popular base for Soviet power in the ostensibly oppressed group of Uzbek women rather than in poor peasants.

In the period of Soviet rule prior to collectivization, the state had largely failed in its attempts to penetrate and transform Central Asian rural society. For most Uzbek peasants, however, the contact with the state produced by the transformational projects of the 1920s had brought exposure to new organs of local leadership tied to a distant center, a new model of social differentiation and privilege backed by state power, and a revolutionary, if not revolutionizing, offensive against accepted standards of culture, belief, and behavior. Through this exposure, individuals had developed practices of accommodation, co-optation, and resistance to the state. They had developed shared grievances alongside a growing ability to understand, and at times to speak, the state’s ideological language. And they had developed a sense of ethno-cultural solidarity alongside a sense of the unique opportunities and dangers Soviet power placed before each individual. The state had rebalanced power and allegiances within the traditional village milieu without dissolving the village as a unit. It was within the context of this altered social environment, neither fully new nor fully traditional, that Uzbek peasants would understand and react to their experiences of collectivization.

³³ Park 350.

CHAPTER II

COLLECTIVIZATION IN PRACTICE

The contours of collectivization in Uzbekistan – its practices, its scope, and its outcomes – perhaps to an even greater extent than elsewhere in the USSR were defined by local initiative as well as central policy. Throughout the Soviet Union, the incredibly murky instructions issuing from the central party leadership regarding how collectivization was to be carried out produced a wave of chaotic experimentation and pressure for rapid results, both at the level of the republic and locally. But within Uzbekistan, the systemic features of bureaucratic power in the Stalin era – its mediating position, its vulnerability, and its frequent arbitrariness – intersected with the solidaristic ideal, cultural practices, and internal divisions of the Uzbek village to create an enormous potential for both excessive coercion and appropriation of the state apparatus for peasant aims. On a day-to-day basis the power of the central state tended to function through local intermediaries, as a source of vague incentives and even vaguer fears rather than concrete and immutable directives. The result was that the drama of collectivization developed in Uzbekistan predominantly via the face-to-face interactions of local and often Uzbek representatives of Soviet power and Uzbek villagers, with its dynamics shaped as much by individual motives and village social relationships as by long-term state goals, operating as much by means of collaboration and appropriation as by direct control. To a surprising extent, collectivization was carried out by Uzbeks themselves, and within the context of relative disinterest from the central state, it was often Uzbek local officials who ultimately dictated how cruel collectivization would be and who would become its victims.

“Unhealthy Competition” in a Backward Region: Strategies of Collectivization in Uzbekistan

On November 27, 1929, responding to signals from the center and following the lead of party leaders at the republic level throughout the USSR, the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic issued a highly optimistic plan for collectivization in Uzbekistan. Not only did Uzbek agriculture represent an “especially favorable base for collectivization” because of its role in supplying cotton for state industry, they said, but there also existed a “broad attraction of the population to the kolkhozes [collective farms].”³⁴ The Uzbek party leadership concluded that the particular characteristics of the Uzbek countryside would allow “accelerated tempos of kolkhoz construction and the development of kolkhozes from the simplest forms into the highest ones” throughout Uzbekistan. In January and February of 1930, the party declared seventeen of the Uzbek SSR’s eighty-four districts ready for “total collectivization [*sploshnaia kollektivizatsiia*],” including in this number most of the vital cotton-growing regions of the Fergana and Andijan okrugs (see Figure 1).³⁵

After only a few months, however, during which mass resistance to collectivization had erupted across Uzbekistan, with the Fergana valley as the center of especially explosive resistance, the state found itself engaged in vigorous backpedaling. Uzbekistan was no longer an “especially favorable” site for collectivization policies; instead, it was an economically “backward” region demanding particular caution and gradualism. The overarching narrative here is again familiar from the standpoint of Soviet collectivization as a whole. As Sheila Fitzpatrick notes, for the first several months of the collectivization campaign, “the kolkhoz was a relatively empty concept,” with local and republic-level authorities left to fill in the details that the state had

³⁴ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 1, 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 20, 74.



Figure 1. Administrative Division of the Uzbek SSR, 1929-1938: 9 okrugs, 84 raions. Adapted from: *Atlas Uzbekskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki*, Akademiia Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR: Tashkent, 1963.

Okrug	Administrative Center
Andijan okrug	Andijan
Bukhara okrug	Bukhara
Fergana okrug	Fergana
Kashka-darya okrug	Karshi
Khorezm okrug	Khiva
Samarkand okrug	Samarkand
Surkhan-darya okrug	Termez
Tashkent okrug	Tashkent
Zeravshan okrug	Kermine

left unresolved – tempo, scale, the form of the collective organization, and so on.³⁶ Fitzpatrick argues that this lack of detail in central state planning was not accidental; instead, “It appears to have been a strategy whose main objective was to get local cadres pushing for the absolute maximum, thus providing both quick results and information on what the attainable maximum actually was.”³⁷ Without clear instructions from the center, the default position, particularly within the feverish atmosphere of the First Five-Year Plan, was maximalism – collectivization at the fastest possible tempo, on the largest possible scale, and to the highest possible degree. Uzbekistan was no exception to this trend, as intense pressure for results from Moscow reached leaders at the republic level, who in turn conveyed it to the hundreds of local officials responsible for implementing collectivization in the countryside.

In Uzbekistan, as in the Soviet Union as a whole, clear directives from the center arrived only several months in to the collectivization campaign, at a point when maximalist methods had already yielded mass peasant unrest that alarmed the party leadership. At the end of January 1930, the Central Asian Bureau (*Sredazbiuro*), a party organization with authority over Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian republics, received a telegram from Stalin and Molotov hinting at a need for caution. “The transfer of accelerated tempos of collectivization from the center of the USSR to the regions of Central Asia we consider unfounded. A thorough consideration of the specific conditions of these regions, especially Tajikistan, is required.”³⁸ In other words, measures that might be appropriate for the more “advanced” regions of the Russian republic were inappropriate in the economically “backward” conditions of Central Asia. In early February, the Politburo issued a similar criticism of republic-level leaders who had too

³⁶ Fitzpatrick 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁸ V. Danilov et al, eds., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie: dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh, 1927-1939* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), t. 2, No. 49, 131.

conscientiously responded to cues from above, attempting to “mechanically transfer the Central Committee’s planned measures against the kulaks... to national republics with backward [otstalye] economies.”³⁹ Finally, on February 20, definitive instructions arrived from Moscow, demanding that the Sredazbiuro “urgently review the districts of total collectivization” and preserve only those where extensive “preparatory work” had been done, spontaneous activism existed among the poor peasants, and there was no danger that mass unrest would disrupt the spring sowing.⁴⁰ Gradualism was flatly demanded. Of course, this sudden retreat to caution and slower tempos was hardly unique to Uzbekistan. Stalin’s March 2 article “Dizzy with Success” stunned local party workers throughout the USSR with its repudiation of the breakneck collectivization of the preceding months. But the special circumstances of the Central Asian case continued to be emphasized in party communications, which underscored “the necessity of lengthy preparatory work for kolkhoz construction in the national oblasts and republics of the east,” suggesting the dangers not only of economic backwardness, but of cultural backwardness as well.⁴¹

According to the central party apparatus, the Uzbek leadership had erred in two ways. First, it had failed to take account of the real circumstances in the Uzbek countryside in implementing collectivization. At first glance, this criticism seems strictly logical. Central Asia had long been regarded as a sensitive borderland and had very recently, in the 1927 unveiling campaign, revealed its potential for violent anti-Soviet reaction. Its continued remoteness from all of the social and economic bases of Soviet power, as well as its ethnic and cultural separation from the state’s dominant Russian element, provided fertile ground for movements of resistance.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 75, 174.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 98, 255.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 142, 367.

Yet it was this very perceived fragility of the foundations of Soviet power that had pushed the state throughout the 1920s to pursue comprehensive transformation as often as cautious gradualism in Uzbekistan. The sweeping, invasive campaigns of land reform and women's emancipation were designed as attempts to *engineer* favorable circumstances for the state by means of a frontal assault on Uzbek society. Indeed, collectivization itself had been undertaken on an all-union scale not because conditions in the countryside were favorable to Soviet power, but precisely because the peasantry presented a particularly thorny problem for the state, as indicated in the grain procurement crisis of 1928. Within this context, the Uzbek Communist Party's failure to moderate its approaches based on the perceived readiness of the peasantry seems deeply characteristic, if not wholly inevitable.

Moscow's second, and arguably more essential, criticism of the Uzbek party leaders lay in their failure to appreciate the distinction between the vital grain-growing regions of central Russia, the Ukraine, and the North Caucasus, and the somewhat less vital agricultural economy of Uzbekistan. The rallying cry of "cotton independence" for the USSR, to be achieved through the expansion of the Central Asian cotton culture on ostensibly more efficient and mechanized collective farms, was important, but not so important as control over primary grain supplies. Thus, although the Ukraine far surpassed Central Asia in the scale of its mass resistance to collectivization, it was only the "national oblasts and republics of the east" that were granted special lenience; in Uzbekistan, rapid collectivization was not worth provoking peasant violence.⁴² The Uzbek party was chided for a faulty desire to "accelerate the tempo of collectivization in order to catch up to and surpass in this respect the other oblasts and republics of the Soviet Union," and in particular, to surpass the "advanced [*peredovye*] grain-growing

⁴² For statistics on resistance in the various national republics, see *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 278, 801-808.

regions.”⁴³ Such desires, labeled in party documents as manifestations of “unhealthy competition,” hinted at motivations of both careerism and national pride.⁴⁴ But at their root was a fundamental misunderstanding: for all of the frenzied activity and intense pressure that was no doubt experienced in the Uzbek apparatus as elsewhere during the first few chaotic months of collectivization, Uzbekistan was, when viewed from Moscow, a periphery, and it was ultimately peripheral to the short-term goals and concerns that lay behind the drive for collectivization.

“Excesses and Distortions” or Silent Subversion? Implementation and the Problem of Local Cadres

If from the perspective of the Moscow leadership Uzbekistan tended to represent an object of secondary concern in the collectivization campaign, this did not alter the fact that for local authorities and Uzbek peasants alike conflicts over collectivization became the central axis of state-society relations, and even a central feature of daily life, through at least the end of 1930. The “campaign mode” of state operation, familiar by this point from the land reform, periodic mosque closings, and unveiling movement of the preceding years, resumed with its peculiar *modus operandi*: the influx of outsiders into the villages, the near-constant meetings of *bedniaks* and *batraks* led by outsider “instructors” and agitators, and wide-ranging attempts to mobilize the poor in a struggle against traditional sources of village authority.⁴⁵ According to one Soviet source, 433 urban volunteers for the implementation of collectivization, known in the Soviet Union as a whole as “25,000ers,” arrived in Uzbekistan from Moscow, Leningrad, and other Russian cities, and 253 urban workers were mobilized within the republic itself to become

⁴³ Ibragimova 238; Allamuradov, 167.

⁴⁴ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 33, 117.

⁴⁵ See, for example, *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 32, 108.

kolkhoz chairmen or board members or to work in local party cells.⁴⁶ In spring of 1930, the sowing campaign brought a further 26 workers' brigades numbering 458 people. In addition to being of non-peasant origin, such people were often, and perhaps usually, Russian, and many did not speak any Central Asian languages at all.⁴⁷

Just as in the land reform campaign, friction over issues of ethnicity, language, and culture seemed virtually guaranteed given these circumstances, and outbreaks of hostility did in fact occur. In one case in March of 1930, the peasants of three villages attacked the members of a workers' brigade after the latter had been "calling the dekhkans 'basmachis' and pointing rifles at them."⁴⁸ Not only did the brigade workers brand the peasants with the pejorative term "basmachi," which literally means "bandit," they also employed it as a sort of racial epithet and accompanied it with threatening behavior. OGPU observers attributed this incident to the "incompetence [*golovotiapstvo*]" of the brigade, but it suggests some degree of deep-seated ethnic hostility and mistrust, which would almost certainly have been exacerbated by the confrontational form that the collectivization campaign often assumed. On the whole, however, instances of direct confrontation between Russian agitators and Uzbek peasants seem to have been relatively rare. For Uzbek peasants, the role of Russians in implementing collectivization, which was in fact numerically quite small, at times acquired an importance out of proportion with its actual scale, and the idea that collectivization was somehow fundamentally a Russian project carried out by Russians became the basis for several instances of peasant resistance.

Overwhelmingly, however, the task of implementing collectivization fell to the local authorities of the sel'sovet and the *raispolkom* (RIK) – as we have seen, a group that was more

⁴⁶ Ibragimova 232.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴⁸ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 254.

often than not Uzbek, non-party, and, in the case of the sel'sovet at least, immersed in peasant society. Whereas these official and relatively stable structures of state influence in the countryside had played a subsidiary role to outsiders and activist organizations during land reform, in the collectivization campaign they became one of the most crucial interfaces between state policy and peasant experience. Accordingly, as elsewhere in the USSR, they became both the frequent mediators and the occasional targets of peasant resistance to collectivization in Uzbekistan.⁴⁹ Douglas Northrop observes that the more limited group of Uzbek Bolsheviks tended to be simultaneously “denounced as national traitors” for their cooperation with the Soviet state and “well positioned and frequently all too eager to subvert that state and its interests in practice.”⁵⁰ The non-party local authorities at the level of the village, though less likely to be distinguished by any ideological devotion to the state and less subject to centralized supervision and control, served a similar function as intermediaries, standing with one foot in the world of careerism, official pressures, and individual power granted by the state, and the other foot in a world of personal sympathy, shared belief and standards of behavior, and the social networks and measures of community control that characterized village life.

Even with the help of such generalizations, however, the figure of the local Soviet official, who so often features in accounts of collectivization and peasant resistance, remains something of an enigma. What is known about these individuals emerges mainly through state reports complaining, on the one hand, that they had committed “mistakes,” “excesses,” or “distortions of the party line” in their execution of the party’s collectivization policies, which generally meant that they had used excessive force or acted without regard for local conditions and peasant desires, and on the other hand, that they had failed to act forcefully enough,

⁴⁹ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, t. 2, No. 278, 808.

⁵⁰ Northrop 210.

displaying sympathy toward the peasants and subtly blunting the impact of state policy. This range of responses to the competing pressures of loyalty to the state and loyalty to the village, as well as the basic conundrum they present to the historian attempting to discern motives and social relationships under the circumstances of collectivization, may be illustrated by two anecdotes.

Both incidents occurred during the 1931 wave of property confiscation, arrest, and deportation directed against “kulaks” – in the Uzbek context, used interchangeably with the term “bais” – and their families, in total numbering over 22,000 people.⁵¹ In the first case, a kulak who had been slated for arrest and deportation had managed to escape and hide from the authorities. In response, the secretary of the village Communist Party cell arrested the man’s brother, with the intention of holding him as a “hostage” until the brother turned himself in to the authorities. This action was viewed with dismay by the supervising authorities and judged to be excessively coercive, all the more so since the hostage turned out to be an “activist, bedniak, and kolkhoznik [member of a collective farm],” and thus one of the small number of Uzbek peasants who were openly supportive of the Soviet state and its policies of collectivization.⁵² In the second case, the rounding up and deportation of the kulaks had generated a village-wide display of sympathy, with peasants walking in mournful procession behind the deportation convoy. Included in their number were members of the local party organizations and militiamen. The OGPU report on this incident anxiously listed the names of those who publicly wept for the kulaks: Mir Adylov, a leader in the local party cell; Rakhim Mutalov, a student; Tashmukhamed Tuichi, a militiaman.⁵³ Although not interpreted as open defiance of Soviet policies, a local official’s participation in

⁵¹ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 279, 154-158. This figure reflects the count as of May 1932.

⁵² *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 26.

such a demonstration indicated to OGPU observers an unhealthy sympathy for the “class enemy” and a worrisome adherence to village solidarity over party discipline.

The immediate impulse in interpreting these events would be to classify and categorize, to see careerism, pressure from above, innate indifference to suffering, collaborationist tendencies, or readiness to abuse power in the first case, and human sympathy, subversion of the state, or loyalty to the village in the second. The problem is that the overzealous Communist official in the first story is in fact the same Mir Adylov who walked weeping behind the deported kulaks. This amazing divergence in behaviors – excessive force in one case, and “excessive” sympathy in another; zeal in carrying out the policy of dekulakization in one case, even at the expense of the rights of a fellow non-kulak villager, and a public display of support for the kulaks who were victims of the policy in another – signals the intrinsic limitations of state documents as a window on individual behavior and social relations in the Uzbek village under collectivization. We know next to nothing about how and why certain individuals became representatives of Soviet power in Uzbekistan – their histories, their motivations, their beliefs. Even Faizullah Khojaev, who was one of the most important Uzbek leaders at the national level until his show trial and execution in 1938, and who traveled to the Fergana region during the period of collectivization and personally succeeded in defusing a number of mass disturbances peacefully, remains something of a cryptic figure.⁵⁴ In the case of Mir Adylov, we may speculate on what motivated his seemingly contradictory behaviors – he may have misunderstood what the state actually demanded of him and acted out of fear, or held a personal grudge against the bedniak in question, perhaps precisely for being a pro-collectivization activist, or he simply may have been responding to state pressure to achieve rapid results in one situation and pressure from the village to display solidarity in the other. But his case serves as a vivid reminder of the whole world of

⁵⁴ See below, Chapter III.

thought, speech, and human interaction lying behind the state documents, and as an admonition against the attempt to sharply distinguish between those individuals who collaborated with Soviet power and those who sought to co-opt it.

With this caveat in place, it is possible to analyze the specific ways in which local cadres served as intermediaries during the collectivization campaign, if not always to divine their underlying motivations or their position in relation to the village social sphere. The problem from the perspective of the central state of finding qualified and trustworthy local cadres was by no means unique to Uzbekistan, but it was aggravated there by the language barrier and by what Northrop calls the continuing “cultural hegemony” of Islamic religious and social practices in spite of the state’s attempts to undermine and replace them.⁵⁵ As a result, in the process of transmitting any party policy to the level of the individual village, misunderstandings, ambiguities, and alterations proliferated.

At times, the republic-level Uzbek authorities simply echoed the blame-shifting language of the central Soviet state, in essence criticizing local officials for following instructions too diligently. “The declaration of one or another raion as a raion of total collectivization,” the Uzbek Communist Party lectured in March of 1930, shortly after receiving its own dressing-down from the center, “should not be interpreted as a mandatory, rapid bringing of collectivization in these raions to 100%, and under no circumstances does it permit administrative measures in the organization of kolkhozes.”⁵⁶ Uzbek party leaders similarly condemned “groundless competition among raions” and “the exceeding of control figures for collectivization,” accusing okrug and especially raion officials of “unhealthy playing at collectivization [*igra v kollektivizatsiiu*] by means of taking the maximum tempo without considering the circumstances, the real desires of

⁵⁵ Northrop 316.

⁵⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 33, 120.

the masses, and the possibility of consolidating the results of collectivization.”⁵⁷ To some extent, then, such condemnations of the work of local officials simply represented the same bureaucratic hierarchy of accusation and blame as that epitomized in Stalin’s “Dizzy with Success,” wherein guilt was funneled toward lower authorities for impulses that were cued, if not directly ordered, by the center.

Not all of the Uzbek party’s complaints about the local collectivization authorities were mere exercises in buck-passing, however. All of the confusion about how collectivization was to be carried out and what form the kolkhoz was to take only compounded the underlying lack of understanding of Bolshevik ideology and party policy that afflicted Uzbek authorities at the raion and sel’sovet level and that was one price of the indigenization policies. A report on the progress of collectivization in Fergana okrug from early 1930 flatly stated, “The apparatus directing collectivization is extremely weak. Out of the officials [*rabotniki*] in the region, almost no one knows clearly what a kolkhoz is and how it must be organized.”⁵⁸ In the absence of such knowledge, officials guessed and improvised. Some seem to have come to the conclusion that kolkhoz registration was essentially ritualistic. In one village in Samarkand okrug, the raion and sel’sovet officials called on peasants one by one for questioning about their “property and social situation,” asked them to make some sort of vow, and declared that henceforth they would be considered kolkhoz members.⁵⁹ It was not uncommon for kolkhoz lists to be compiled from names of villagers without any particular action being taken, and occasionally even without their knowledge, although this seems more likely to have been a tactic for deliberately falsifying

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 27, 91-92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 23, 80.

⁵⁹ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 254.

results than a result of honest misunderstanding.⁶⁰ In other cases, local officials, apparently with some vague knowledge of the Bolshevik platform, pushed for forms of collectivization that, even to the Bolsheviks, seemed altogether utopian. A report from February 1930 observed a desire among some local authorities to “immediately organize the highest forms of unification, all the way up to the commune.”⁶¹ The officials at one village meeting probably won more skepticism than enthusiasm from the peasants when they explained, “To be in a kolkhoz means to have a common pot, a common cup, and a common bed.”⁶²

Once the details of kolkhoz organization had become clearer, centering on the socialization of peasant lands and draft animals, the more pressing problem arose of inducing peasants to join the kolkhoz and surrender this property to collective ownership. In Zeravshan okrug, the local authorities resorted to what a critical state report called “outright deception,” promising the peasants that in the kolkhoz they would be provided with “agricultural implements, tractors, and machines, which in actuality do not exist.”⁶³ When persuasion failed, especially in the early months of 1930, threats and coercion (coded in bureaucratic language as “administrative methods [*administrirovanie*]”) were the ready alternatives. This reversion to the use of force was such an omnipresent fact of collectivization at the local level prior to the mass reassessment brought about by “Dizzy with Success” that it hardly demands special explanation in the case of Uzbekistan. But it is worth observing that Stalin again made specific note of the Uzbek case

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 27, 91.

⁶¹ *Tragediia sredneaziatkogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 27, 92.

⁶² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 27, 91. This is yet another situation in which deducing the motives of the local officials is difficult. The myth of the collectivization of all personal property, and even more so the myth of what Viola calls the “common blanket,” here rendered as the “common bed,” figured prominently in discourses of resistance to collectivization. See Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*, 46. The party document describing this incident, however, reads the statement not as a subversive attempt to discourage peasants from joining the kolkhoz, but as one in a long series of examples demonstrating the local authorities’ basic incompetence.

⁶³ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 257.

(whether because it represented a particularly egregious example of coercive methods or because of its special status as an “economically backward region” is not clear) in a February 25 speech before the Politburo, stating, “The methods of collectivization being practiced in some districts of Uzbekistan (threats of deprivation of water and goods and the use of armed force) are inadmissible.”⁶⁴ An OGPU report on Fergana okrug offers a closer look at this type of intimidation: “The explanations given to the dekhkan masses about kolkhoz construction amounted to, ‘Registration in the kolkhoz is mandatory. Those not registering will be deprived of water, heavily taxed, taken off of state provisions [*gossnabzhenie*], and deported from Uzbekistan.’”⁶⁵ When threats failed, police power might be invoked, with the arrest of peasants refusing to join the kolkhoz, the bodily escort of reluctant villagers into meetings on collectivization, and even “arrests of *seredniaks* demanding an explanation of the kolkhozes.”⁶⁶ As in the other Soviet republics, such practices are recorded in detail precisely because they were not endorsed by the state. While criticisms of local officials for violating the principle of “voluntarism” in kolkhoz construction may rightly be dismissed as hypocritical, the party leadership was genuinely concerned (at least after the March 1930 retreat) with preventing acts of coercion against *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* in Uzbekistan; “excesses” against the poor and especially middle peasants were blamed with driving them into solidarity with the kulaks and provoking mass disturbances. The ubiquity of this sort of unsanctioned coercion even in a region with a historically low rate of ideological commitment to Communist Party projects suggests that violence tended to emerge out of the muddled mixture of personal power and personal vulnerability endemic to the lower-level officialdom of the Stalin era.

⁶⁴ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, t. 2, No. 102, 260.

⁶⁵ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 23, 80.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 22, 77-78.

Despite the susceptibility of local officials to central supervision and occasional censure, they might also use their power to advance interests separate from and sometimes contrary to those of the Soviet state. During the wave of protests in the initial months of collectivization, local authorities often found themselves compelled by village opinion to accept kulaks into the kolkhoz, despite the fact that “exploiter classes” were supposed to be prohibited from joining.⁶⁷ Just as with the pressure from above for rapid results, responses to pressure from below might reflect any number of individual motivations – personal conviction, pragmatism, conciliation, or simple fear. In several areas of Samarkand okrug in February of 1930, kulaks were accepted into the kolkhozes, according to state reports, because local authorities feared “the strengthening of the bai opposition.”⁶⁸ Such fears were not groundless – as the immediate and most accessible agents of Soviet power, sel’sovet and RIK authorities were always among the first individuals targeted with complaints, demands, harassment, and even violence by disgruntled peasants.⁶⁹ But what the state attributed to fear might just as easily have been an indication of the continued privileging of local over Soviet norms of behavior in the Uzbek countryside. Officials at the sel’sovet level, obliged to live directly among the tightly-knit communities of peasants they were governing, and at times originating from within those communities themselves, continued to feel the weight of the village worldview and its rules of social relationships in spite of their positions of state power.

The failure of Soviet power, even at its most coercive, to totally override and replace the long-standing structures of authority and mutual obligation in the Uzbek village resulted in a series of tactics of deflection and subversion among local officials. The dekulakization

⁶⁷ See, for example, *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 45, 204.

⁶⁸ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 22, 78.

⁶⁹ This will be examined in detail in the section on peasant resistance, Chapter III.

campaign, because it relied so heavily on local initiative in identifying and taking action against kulaks, exemplified these tactics particularly frequently. One method of undercutting the campaign at the local level was simple passivity. In one raion the political commission responsible for identifying and deporting kulaks was described as “inactive.”⁷⁰ More risky was the attempt to warn kulaks (who might be family members, friends, or simply respected members of the community to the responsible officials) in advance of the confiscation of their property and arrest, exacerbating the state’s already great problem of kulaks fleeing with their livestock and movable property. In one case, an official instructed the police to release six kulaks who had been arrested and slated for deportation. The six fled, and subsequent attempts to locate and re-arrest the fugitives managed to turn up only two.⁷¹ Some Uzbek party members petitioned on behalf of deported kulaks and, when this failed, organized the collection of money in the village for their benefit.⁷²

In this way, local officials might use their positions of power to display solidarity or improve the lot of the individuals under their jurisdiction. But others were just as willing to wholeheartedly adopt the methods of the dekulakization campaign for their own purposes, targeting local undesirables or settling old scores within the village. In May of 1932 in a village of Surkhan-darya okrug, two peasant households were registered as “kulak” by decision of village meetings, with the decisions signed by members of the kolkhoz party cell and verified by local political authorities. The families were rounded up and sent to a collection point for deportation. But when they arrived there, the officials at the collection point discovered that one household was in fact *bedniak*, and the other was *seredniak*. According to the report of the raion-level

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 25.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 24.

officials who uncovered this incident, “It turned out that their exile was the product of squabbling and group activity [*skloki i gruppirovshchina*].”⁷³ In other words, local authorities had, with the complicity of other groups within the village, selected these two households for deportation not on socioeconomic grounds, as the state desired, but according to some internal village assessment of their relative worth to the community, or perhaps of their level of blame in some local dispute. As in the land reform campaign, the language of the state became a weapon, and individuals with access to state power could either coalesce in solidarity against it, or wield it against other peasants for their own purposes.

The implementation of collectivization in Uzbekistan depended on face-to-face interactions between individual agents of Soviet power and Uzbek peasants in a contentious setting of transformative outside impulses and controlling village conventions. First and foremost, this encounter provoked peasant resistance, whether by drawing attention to its Russian, urban, non-Islamic, non-traditional features or by generating particularly coercive behavior among the officials at the village level. But although local officials often emerge from the documents in the guise of petty tyrants, committing “excesses” and “distortions” at the expense of indignant peasants, they were neither all-powerful nor totally above and apart from village society by virtue of their access to Soviet state power. Instead, the village itself, with its appeals to ethnic and religious solidarity, the pull of its community influence and capacity for ostracism, and even its numerical superiority over the scattered and relatively isolated state officials, constituted an alternative locus of power, acting through a combination of persuasion and force to restrain, modify, and subvert the progress of the collectivization campaign. As in the case of Mir Adylov, local officials stood between these two worlds not as passive conduits of state policy or bastions of village traditionalism, but rather as active mediators of the pressures

⁷³ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 278, 151. The term used for “group” here, *gruppirovka*, is generally used in official documents describing peasant resistance to denote low-level conspiratorial activity against collectivization.

from above and the pressures from below, exhibiting highly individualized motives of self-interest, sympathy, fear, and score-settling that are not always clear or accessible to the historian. Most importantly, though, the position of such individuals makes plain that the Uzbek village was neither a closed, monolithic entity nor an inert object of revolutionary state transformations. The Soviet state had not overcome the power of village social relationships over belief, affiliation, and behavior in the localities, but the new levers of state power and channels of authority created through the state's transformative campaigns had shifted the terms and altered the stakes of these relationships, providing fertile new ground for both resistance and collaboration.

CHAPTER III

DYNAMICS OF PEASANT RESISTANCE

The course that resistance to collectivization took in Uzbekistan between 1929 and 1931 was tightly linked with the problems of state policy and local implementation. One of the striking features of the dynamics of peasant resistance, both on a broad scale and in its individual manifestations, was its immense sensitivity to short-term fluctuations in state methods. The truly mass movements of peasant resistance peaked in the narrow window between February and March of 1930, corresponding to a high point in state coercion as well as an especially pronounced rift between central and local authorities, and fell off sharply afterward as the state began to vigorously enforce and propagandize a less coercive approach to collectivization in Central Asia. Within individual instances of resistance, too, the development of peasant actions often seems to have hinged on the specific acts of state agents: one ill-advised arrest of a *bedniak* could trigger a massive, violent protest, while one reassuring “explanation” of the principle of voluntarism could just as quickly return an agitated crowd to calm. Rather than indicating a long-term and uncompromising streak of Uzbek peasant opposition to the Soviet state, this perspective seems to signal the contingent nature of peasant resistance, its orientation toward achieving an acceptable *modus vivendi* rather than overturning state power, its responsiveness to changes in the day-to-day operations of collectivization policy rather than high-minded rejection of collectivization on principle.

At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to view peasant resistance as merely reactive, as a mechanical response to immediate circumstances without connection to the larger question of the legitimacy of Soviet rule in Central Asia. Alongside the apparent malleability of

peasant resistance, there existed a strain of intransigence and maximalism that often emerged in the language of peasant slogans and demands. If in rural Russia resistance to collectivization overlapped with resistance to the state's anti-religious policies, in Uzbekistan it additionally encompassed the issues of women, nationality, and traditional culture that had drawn the Soviet state into conflict with Uzbek society throughout the 1920s. As a result, Uzbek peasants typically voiced their resistance to collectivization on economic, cultural, religious, and political grounds simultaneously, and these motivations overlapped to the point of being almost interchangeable: an act of resistance triggered by the coerced establishment of a kolkhoz could proceed under slogans against unveiling, and vice versa. On the one hand, most peasants seem to have been ready to submit to a mildly ameliorated version of Soviet rule, with its most confrontational aspects moderated but without underlying changes in policy; on the other hand, as they acted publicly against the Soviet state, peasants often framed their resistance as a rejection not only of the most coercive elements of collectivization, but of the Soviet transformative program as a whole.

This gap between what peasants demanded and what they were ultimately willing to accept doubtless reflects the ebb and flow of heightened emotions, as well as the simple limits that possibility placed on ideal notions. But, more speculatively, it may also reflect a fundamental fluidity in peasants' conceptualizations of the Soviet state and their own place in it. Receiving wildly mixed cues from the state regarding its intentions and methods, they drew in turn on their own deeply mixed past experiences of Soviet rule, which incorporated both its disruption of old ways of life and the new possibilities it offered for compromise, collaboration, and even personal advancement. Collectivization offered a vital testing ground for state-society relationships in the Uzbek countryside, in which peasant aims and patterns of affiliation

underwent continuous re-negotiation in response to the changing grievances, challenges, and opportunities created by the state.

The View from Above: Chronology, Scale, and Forms of Peasant Response

As with the state's collectivization policy and the problems of implementation, the overarching shape of peasant resistance in Uzbekistan broadly accords with the results of collectivization elsewhere in the USSR. The varieties of peasant resistance in Uzbekistan generally adhere to the scheme set out by Lynne Viola, ranging from evasion and "self-help" to terror and village riots. But rather than reading all such acts as manifestations of a "civil war" between the peasantry and the state driven by a relatively fixed peasant "counter-ideology," as Viola argues, it is possible to see in the different forms of resistance varying degrees of engagement and disengagement with the state, as well as diverse goals and targets for opposition.⁷⁴

The earliest instances of peasant resistance to collectivization emerged out of the resistance to the land reform among dispossessed *bais*. In many areas the land reform had not been completed in 1926, but had continued fully up through 1929, at which point it blended imperceptibly into the collectivization-era policy of *dekulakization*. During collectivization, just as during the land reform, individuals sought to evade state interference by concealing or disposing of their property, which might be accomplished by subdividing large landholdings among relatives or by driving livestock animals into the mountains or across the Kazakh border, or, most commonly, selling them off.⁷⁵ Over the course of 1929, such tactics were primarily deployed by the wealthy *bais*, who had much to gain from selling their large reserves of livestock.

⁷⁴ Viola 5.

⁷⁵ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 106, 300; No. 116, 336.

But in the chaotic early months of 1930, when the state's intentions were anything but clear and the future felt profoundly uncertain to most Uzbek peasants, the sale of livestock became a mass phenomenon fueled by widespread panic. Not only bais, but seredniaks and bedniaks, and even party members, rushed to unload their livestock in anticipation of collectivization.⁷⁶ The markets were flooded, and the result was, in the words of a state observer, a “catastrophic” decline in livestock prices – in Tashkent okrug, for example, prices for horses, oxen, and sheep fell by over 50%.⁷⁷ The terse comment of the sellers in this unfavorable market is recorded: “Better to sell for a pittance than to hand over to the commune for free [*Luchshe za bestsenok prodat', chem v kommuny darom otdat'*].” In Zeravshan okrug, the situation was even more dire: “The population has been seized by such great panic that in some villages they have begun to sell their livestock on credit.”⁷⁸ On the one hand, these strategies reflected a sort of economic rationality, and indeed were practiced by peasants everywhere in the Soviet Union as a response to collectivization; on the other hand, the atmosphere of panic is telling. Peasants were acting not simply out of cold economic interest, but out of a sense of deep distrust in the state's ability or desire to guarantee their future economic well-being.

Taken to its extreme, disengagement from the state could result in emigration. As a region, Central Asia possessed the massive foreign border and cross-border religious and ethnic ties that made emigration a viable means of escaping collectivization. Of the Central Asian republics, however, Uzbekistan's foreign border was by far the narrowest, and the impulse to emigrate tended to remain concentrated where it was most immediately feasible, namely in the Surkhan-darya okrug bordering on Afghanistan. As in the case of the sale or concealment of

⁷⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 27, 92; No. 22, 78.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 116, 336.

⁷⁸ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 257.

property, emigration first emerged during the land reform and continued at a relatively low level throughout the entire period of dekulakization. In addition to *bais*, other *lishentsy* groups like clergy and officials from pre-Soviet governments were the most likely to emigrate. In January of 1929, before the beginning of collectivization proper but in connection with the expanding scope of the land reform and persecution of *bais*, a number of former emir officials in Surkhan-darya okrug concluded, “There is no life for us here anymore. The only salvation is to leave for Afghanistan.”⁷⁹ By February of 1930, at the height of the chaos, the outflow of population had become considerable enough that the Politburo instructed the leadership of the Central Asian republics to “take decisive measures, up to the confiscation of livestock and all property, in regard to households attempting to emigrate across the border.”⁸⁰ Moreover, although the phenomenon of emigration tended to remain geographically limited within Uzbekistan to the regions immediately adjacent to the border, it was not solely limited to the wealthy stratum of the population; in August of 1931, a wave of emigrations swept through *bedniak* and *seredniak* households in Surkhan-darya okrug in response to the fear and discontent bred by the deportation of the *bais*.⁸¹ While never reaching the massive dimensions of emigration from other Central Asian republics, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, emigration presented a small number of Uzbeks with a concrete alternative to Soviet rule, and a situation in which the comprehensive rejection of the state became a practical possibility.

For most Uzbek peasants, however, total disengagement from the state was not an option, and evasion was at best a temporary solution. The collectivization campaign brought peasants into direct, face-to-face confrontation with agents of state power, and active resistance became a

⁷⁹ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 106, 300.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 98, 253.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 31.

hallmark of these interactions. At times, this meant violence. The phenomenon of “peasant terror” is again familiar from accounts of collectivization in the USSR as a whole, but it manifested itself in Uzbekistan in idiosyncratic ways.⁸² The term “terror” was used in Soviet documents to describe a whole array of peasant acts of resistance, from property destruction to beatings of local officials to the murder of pro-Soviet activists. In Central Asia as a whole, the total number of acts of terror was quite small – only 302 instances for the year of 1930, compared to some 2,779 in the Ukraine.⁸³ But whereas “terror” directed against property, such as arson and the destruction of tractors or agricultural implements, tended to predominate in the Ukraine and Russia, “only in the eastern-national republics and oblasts,” among them Uzbekistan, “did physical terror predominate over property destruction.”⁸⁴ There were a small number of cases of the destruction of property recorded in Uzbekistan; in Bukhara okrug in February of 1930, a group of *bais* destroyed the measuring equipment that was being used to divide up their property, and in Kashka-darya okrug, eight tractor plows were sabotaged and their parts stolen by local peasants.⁸⁵ But in the majority of instances, the targets of terror in Central Asia were human beings.

Terror is probably the method of peasant resistance that receives the least satisfactory explanation in the state documents. Violence might be carried out either publicly, in crowds, or secretly, by individuals or small groups; either in the heat of a dispute, or as a calculated plan of intimidation or revenge; either against village “insiders” or against “outsiders.” From what can be gathered in official reports, the targets for violence appear to have been, first, the individuals who represented the face of Soviet power in the village on a day-to-day basis, and second, the

⁸² See Viola 100-131.

⁸³ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, t. 2, No. 278, 808.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 278, 789.

⁸⁵ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 46, 205.

peasants (usually bedniaks or former batraks) who actively collaborated with the state. To some extent, this accorded with the pattern of peasant violence that emerged out of the unveiling campaign, in which unveiled Uzbek women and Uzbek activists were targeted for beatings and murders at least as often as were Russian officials.⁸⁶ During collectivization, acts of violence in a mass public setting, which overwhelmingly took the form of beatings, tended to be relatively mild compared to acts of “individual terror,” which might include the murder of an activist along with members of his family.⁸⁷ In one case in 1931 reported in *Pravda Vostoka*, Abdulla Faiziev, an active peasant supporter of collectivization, “exposed” five members of his kolkhoz as kulaks. They were subsequently expelled from the kolkhoz, and in retaliation they “brutally murdered Abdulla Faiziev, his wife, and his twelve-year-old child.”⁸⁸ Such acts of premeditated revenge, in addition to the public acts of demonstrative violence carried out by crowds against local officials and activists, to some extent served to enforce village solidarity and reassert a traditional power structure over the inverted socioeconomic hierarchy of the collectivization era. Yet, at the same time, peasant “terror” tended to reflect emotionally-charged circumstances and isolated attempts to disrupt the implementation of policy at a local level more than a concerted assault on the bases of Soviet power.

The revitalization of the basmachi resistance, which began in 1928 after several years of dormancy, seemed to promise a more coordinated and protracted basis for violent peasant opposition to collectivization in Central Asia, even the foundation for a real armed insurrection against the Soviet state.⁸⁹ The basmachi movement served as an emblem of total resistance to

⁸⁶ Northrop 95-96.

⁸⁷ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 131, 376.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 90, 266.

⁸⁹ Aleksandr Igorevich Pylev, *Basmachestvo v Srednei Azii: etnopoliticheskii srez (vzgliad iz XXI veka)* (Bishkek: Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University Press, 2006), 105-106.

Soviet power, often under an anti-Russian and pro-Muslim banner, and claimed a heroic legacy of resistance from the years of revolution and civil war. Nevertheless, the basmachi resistance that flared up during collectivization never constituted a single cohesive organization. Rather, it was a common name given to the numerous small, independently constituted bands that formed across Central Asia for purposes of violent resistance, each averaging only about 20-50 members. When larger contingents formed, such as the 2000 followers of Ibragim-bek, a basmachi leader from the revolutionary era who had returned from Afghanistan to lead resistance against collectivization, the base of their activities tended to be the less Sovietized regions of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.⁹⁰ Occasionally, bands would cross the republic borders into Uzbekistan to conduct nighttime raids, attacking collective farms and murdering local officials and party members.⁹¹ But more than anything else, in the Uzbek SSR basmachi resistance tended to serve as a conceptual model for violent and organized peasant opposition as it was understood by both state officials and the peasants themselves. OGPU documents made liberal use of the labels “basmachi” and “former basmachi” in describing and explaining acts of organized resistance to collectivization, noting as a general rule that regions of mass peasant resistance tended to correspond to regions of past basmachi activity.⁹² For their part, peasants discussed the basmachi legacy, appealed for its revival, and threatened to become active participants in it to a greater extent than they actually did participate.⁹³ The basmachi movement became a shorthand designation for uncompromising struggle against Soviet power, more important as a rhetorical device and symbol than as a military challenge to Soviet control in the region. It provided an

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

⁹¹ See, for example, *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 265, 121.

⁹² *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 255.

⁹³ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 56, 203; No. 70, 227; No. 120, 347. There were 16 active basmachi bands with a total of 520 members in Uzbekistan in 1930. See Ibragimova, 236.

extreme option for peasants confronted by collectivization – total rejection of the state and solidarity along lines of ethnic and religious affiliation – that was much discussed but rarely adopted by Uzbek peasants.

The truly characteristic form of mass peasant resistance to collectivization in Uzbekistan, then, were what Soviet documents termed “*massovye vystupleniia*,” translated here as “mass demonstrations.” As with “terror,” a diverse set of peasant actions fell under the heading of *vystupleniia*, from the gathering of an agitated crowd, to an overtly political demonstration, to a peasant riot, to the march of armed villagers on a raion center. While such events accompanied peasant resistance everywhere in the USSR, the case of Central Asia was distinguished by the highest average number of participants per incident.⁹⁴ These mass demonstrations, unlike the tendency toward emigration or the basmachi resistance, occurred more frequently in Uzbekistan than in the other Central Asian republics. They reached their peak during February and March of 1930, and declined rapidly afterward.⁹⁵ Yet during these two months alone, more than 65,000 Uzbek peasants participated in such demonstrations.⁹⁶ Despite their temporal and geographical limitations, these mass peasant actions came to be understood as the most serious manifestation of discontent with collectivization in Uzbekistan, and they were the form of peasant resistance that would eventually be most directly responsible for the state’s retreat to a more conciliatory policy. But they were also the form of resistance that exhibited the greatest variability in methods and the greatest diversity of purpose. Whether armed or unarmed, attacking Soviet officials or asking to speak to those of higher rank, threatening the overthrow of the state or petitioning for

⁹⁴ Viola 159. The average for Central Asia in 1930 was 400 participants (115,950 total for 290 incidents); the average for the USSR as a whole was around 250 participants (2,468,625 total for 10,021 incidents). *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, t. 2, No. 278, 801-808.

⁹⁵ An OGPU document records over 42,000 participants in mass demonstrations in Uzbekistan in the period between February 25 and March 12, versus figures of 6,220 for Kyrgyzstan, 700 for Tajikistan, and 500 for Turkmenistan. *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 253.

⁹⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 79, 240-241.

state protection, peasants fluctuated between attempting to engage with the state as citizens and standing outside of it as insurgents.

In February of 1930, the officials of Fergana okrug suddenly began to bombard the Tashkent authorities with a wave of panicked communications. As a fertile agricultural region and a center of the cotton economy, Fergana was singled out as an early target of “total collectivization” and, most likely, of heightened pressure from above for rapid results. Popular opposition to collectivization had been mounting since the beginning of the month, and by mid-February it had erupted into mass, public displays of outrage, not infrequently accompanied by threats or acts of peasant violence. In the village of Zadian on February 19, a crowd of 3000 peasants gathered and called for an end to collectivization. In the village of Kangli, villagers demanded that the state allow kulaks to enter the kolkhoz, and threatened to murder the collectivization plenipotentiary and sel’sovet chairman if their demand was not met. More ominously, such mass demonstrations, despite the state assumption that they were at their base “provoked” and directed by bais and kulaks, were judged to be not simply limited, localized phenomena; rather, according to an official source, they “threaten henceforth in their development to turn into an uprising [*vosstanie*].”⁹⁷ This fear was echoed by officials throughout Fergana okrug. One typically emphatic report from February 27 warned of the “*immediate threat of the escalation of mass demonstrations into rebel actions [povstancheskie deistviia]*.”⁹⁸ Apparently, these fears were not exaggerated – the demonstrations were accompanied by “flashes of armed uprising” in the okrug between February 15 and 20.⁹⁹ By the first week in March, Fergana was in a state of chaos, and while collectivization policy on an all-union level embarked

⁹⁷ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t.3, k.1, No. 45, 203.

⁹⁸ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 27, 93. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 23.

on a course of figurative retreat after Stalin's "Dizzy with Success," Soviet officials in Fergana were retreating more literally. "*In fifteen sel'sovets,*" one March 6 report exclaimed, "*it may be considered that Soviet power does not exist, because the chairmen of these sel'sovets have been beaten up, the majority of them are in hiding and do nothing, and are even afraid to show themselves at their offices in view of the fact that the clergy and kulaks are threatening them with murder.*"¹⁰⁰ In the struggle between the village and the Soviet state for power at the local level, the pendulum had swung decisively, if briefly, in the direction of a traditional village order separate and apart from the Soviet realm.

Over the course of March, mass resistance began to decline in Fergana okrug, but it simultaneously experienced an enormous upswing in many other regions of the country, most startlingly in the neighboring Andijan okrug (see Table 1). On the one hand, this geographical shift probably denoted the time disparity in the arrival of the most oppressive "practical phase" of collectivization in different regions. Throughout March, "total collectivization" arrived successively in various regions of the republic, using the same methods of pressure, threats, and coercion that had spawned resistance in Fergana. On the other hand, one state analysis asserted a direct causal connection to explain the transfer of resistance from Fergana to other areas: the growth of mass disturbances in March, especially in Andijan, was attributed to "the influence of the success of demonstrations against collectivization in Fergana."¹⁰¹ In other words, peasants everywhere in Uzbekistan were adopting the tactics of mass resistance precisely because those tactics had forced a state retreat in Fergana. Within Andijan okrug itself, the news that mass demonstrations had brought about the dissolution of kolkhozes quickly reached neighboring

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 35, 130. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 54, 197.

kolkhozes, where it provoked further mass actions.¹⁰² The state's perceived weakness provided a powerful impetus to resistance, particularly under maximalist claims, and discouraged peasants from searching out opportunities for collaboration and integration under the aegis of Soviet rule.

Table 1. Mass demonstrations by okrug, February 1 – March 17, 1930. Surkhan-darya okrug is not listed. Source: *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 54, 197.

Okrug	Feb. 1-25		Feb. 25-Mar. 17	
	Incidents	Participants	Incidents	Participants
Fergana	17	11,750	4	2000
Bukhara	1	--	13	2600
Andijan	1	--	36	19,373
Kashka-darya	4	930	1	100
Khorezm	3	550	5	2900
Zeravshan	--	--	2	1000
Samarkand	1	50	2	70
Tashkent	--	--	5	5830

With thousands upon thousands of peasants gathering to protest collectivization and the spring sowing grinding to a near halt in some regions, a sense of crisis pervaded communications among raion, okrug, and republic-level officials through the end of March. Already at the beginning of the month, the use of coercion in the formation of collective farms had been repudiated in Stalin's "Dizzy with Success." But the announcement of a policy of moderation at the center, even emanating from Stalin himself, did not engender an immediate change in practices at the local level in Uzbekistan; several more weeks of entreaties, demands, and ultimatums were necessary before local "excesses" were reigned in. Moreover, the immediate

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 55, 198.

effect of the reversal in policy at the top was not to calm peasant resistance. Instead, the result was to create a rift between central and local authorities that badly damaged the legitimacy of raion and sel'sovet officials in the eyes of the population. As a Sredazbiuro report from March 8 observed, "Stalin's article on the tempo of kolkhoz construction has still not even been read over by our officials, and hostile elements have already managed to explain that a telegram has been received from Moscow about the liquidation of all kolkhozes."¹⁰³ Even once the true content of the new policy was known, peasants were prone to react with outrage rather than relief. In one case in Bukhara okrug, a furious crowd of peasants beat the local sel'sovet chairman and plenipotentiaries, shouting, "You forced us, but it turns out that registration [in a kolkhoz] is voluntary."¹⁰⁴ Coercion at the local level was now made to appear completely unnecessary, the product, if anything, of personal malice on the part of local officials.

It is not clear whether the principal goal of Stalin's article – to strengthen Soviet authority by deflecting blame toward local officials – was successful in the Uzbek case in the long term. But as the logical outcome of the reversal in policy, late March and early April of 1930 saw the outright collapse of the collective farms that had been formed during the preceding months. The bitter declaration of one group of kolkhozniks suggests that the experience had bred cynicism and disengagement: "You registered us in the kolkhoz by force, threatening us with arrest and deportation, and now you say that a kolkhoz is a voluntary organization. If that's so, then we are leaving the kolkhoz."¹⁰⁵ By early April, in Fergana okrug alone, 29,112 households had left the collective farms; in Bukhara okrug, the figure was 4,815, and in Zeravshan, 2,657.¹⁰⁶ Between

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 34, 128.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 51, 185.

¹⁰⁵ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 51, 186.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 69, 225; No. 72, 231.

March and July of 1930, the total percent of Uzbek households collectivized declined from 45.5% to 26.8%. Thereafter, kolkhoz enrollment would begin a slow recovery under the new policies of propaganda and gradual pressure over outright coercion. By March of 1931, a year after the state's retreat, collectivization had again reached the level of 47.9%, and by the end of 1932, 74.9% of Uzbek peasants were working on collective farms.¹⁰⁷

Peasant resistance in Uzbekistan would never again regain either the mass dimensions or the rapt state attention that it had garnered in the early months of 1930. In fact, resistance had achieved many of its more limited goals. Kolkhozes were dissolved, local officials responsible for "excesses" were removed from their posts and, at times, even brought to trial, and the state was forced, to some limited extent, to acknowledge peasant grievances. One illustrative example of this was the review of petitions from *lishentsy* who claimed to have been improperly deprived of rights. As will be seen, one political demand that very frequently accompanied mass demonstrations against collectivization was the restoration of rights to all *lishentsy*. Of course, the Soviet state had no intention of granting this request in 1930; the deprivation of rights for "class enemies" and "alien elements" was a principle of revolutionary politics that long predated collectivization, and it would remain in place until the new Soviet Constitution of 1936. Nevertheless, as part of the retreat from the excesses of collectivization in the Soviet Union more generally, some of the harsher sanctions against the *lishentsy* were lifted, and throughout the USSR the state undertook a systematic review of cases involving the deprivation of rights with the aim of correcting "mistakes."¹⁰⁸ In March and April of 1930, Uzbek officials began to investigate peasant petitions about the improper deprivation of rights that in some cases had been

¹⁰⁷ Ibragimova 250.

¹⁰⁸ Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926-1936* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 82-83.

accumulating, ignored, since 1928.¹⁰⁹ In one raion in Andijan okrug, of 1062 people originally deprived of rights, 600 had their rights restored after the investigation of a government commission in April 1930.¹¹⁰ This did not indicate any radical revision of state policy – the cases under review were spurious even by the standards of the Stalin era. For example: “The seredniak Tashpulat Suleimanov from Shur village was deprived of rights for being an amin. When the question was investigated in detail, it turned out that he was not an amin, but the chairman of a sel’sovet, and people simply called him an amin out of habit.”¹¹¹ The new opportunity to see at least some of the most preposterous injustices of the previous months and years resolved through legitimate government channels immediately quelled much of the incentive for Uzbek peasants to participate in mass resistance. It also could, over time, persuade peasants to engage in at least limited and provisional participation in the Soviet system.

Yet this is not to suggest that conciliation alone governed collectivization policy in the countryside after March of 1930, nor that the relationship between the Soviet state and the Uzbek peasantry was fully normalized. Peasant resistance declined mostly as a result of the state’s concessions to gradualism, but also as a result of active repression. Concurrent with the new emphasis on a principle of voluntarism and “explanatory work” in the villages, the OGPU was busying itself with “operational work on removing the counter-revolutionary top ranks of the bais.”¹¹² Coercion, then, began to be applied on a strictly class basis in the Uzbek countryside. Dekulakization was resumed and even accelerated, particularly after the beginning of 1931, but only with the new adamant requirement that local officials “protect the interests of the

¹⁰⁹ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 134, 382.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 1, no. 130, 370.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 54, 196.

seredniaks.”¹¹³ The Soviet state thus engaged in a double-sided strategy of placating the “peasant masses,” the bedniaks and seredniaks, while proceeding with the expropriation, arrest, and deportation of kulaks and their families, who not only were seen as the natural instigators of all peasant resistance, but who also served as ready targets for economic exploitation. In November of 1930, a statement from the Sredazbiuro attributed the shortfall in the planned yearly production of cotton to “insufficient pressure” on the “prosperous-kulak” stratum of the population, and all kulak households not fulfilling their quota obligations were to be subject to a search and the confiscation of all cotton supplies on hand.¹¹⁴ It was exactly this sort of tactic that had been labeled “excessive” when applied to non-kulak peasants and repudiated in the face of mass peasant resistance. The policy realignment in Uzbek collectivization after the spring of 1930 did reduce state coercion with regard to the peasantry, but it also shifted its focus away from the broad masses of the population, who had demonstrated their ability to unite in opposition to the state, and toward the narrow minority of kulak households, “not to exceed 2-3% of the total number of households in the region,” who had been successfully isolated once before during the land reform campaign.¹¹⁵

To a considerable extent, this strategy worked. Resistance did not disappear from Uzbek villages – in fact, it seems to have continued through the entire period of the dekulakization campaign – but it regained something of the low-level, isolated character it had possessed in 1929. Bais concealed or attempted to sell off their property, hid from the authorities or emigrated, and attacked the officials who came to confiscate their property or the activist

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 85, 255.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 141, 402-403.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 150, 444.

villagers who denounced them.¹¹⁶ The state continued to record considerable numbers of “mass disturbances” in the spring of 1931 – 47 incidents in March, 37 in April, and 48 in May – but the number of participants is not recorded, and it seems safe to assume, given the fact that these events were never discussed in detail, that they never approached the hundreds and even thousands of participants of the demonstrations during the year before.¹¹⁷ In one possibly typical case in March 1931, a small crowd gathered to attempt to prevent the arrest of a group of *bais* in the village. The crowd consisted mostly of the *bais*’ wives and relatives, numbering at most 40 people, and they dispersed without much trouble after receiving an “explanation” from the local authorities.¹¹⁸ As one report from August of 1931 summarized, the process of the expropriation, arrest, and deportation of kulaks in Uzbekistan was carried out “on the whole peacefully,” with the crucial fact being that “the *bais*... have very rarely succeeded in gathering the *seredniaks* and *bedniaks* behind them.”¹¹⁹ The Soviet state had succeeded in splitting the previously unified peasant resistance to collectivization along class lines. In the process, they secured the consent and even the active participation of many Uzbek peasants in collectivization, and perhaps, created the basis for a new model of state-society relationships in the Uzbek village.

The View from the Ground: “Enemies of Soviet Power” in Mazar

For all of the general trends that may be used to characterize peasant action on a mass scale, peasant resistance to collectivization in Uzbekistan consisted of a myriad of distinct incidents in which the theoretical concepts of “state” and “society” were played out in face-to-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 29.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 97, 282. In Turkmenistan, by contrast, violent resistance peaked in the spring of 1931 in connection with food shortages and the mandatory sowing of cotton. See Edgar 208-212.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 151, 445.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 28.

face interactions among individuals. For this reason, the shifting aims and motivations of peasant resistance may best be understood by examining the problem in microcosm. The case of the village of Mazar in Fergana okrug presents an unusual opportunity to examine the dynamics of a mass movement of peasant resistance as it developed over the course of a few weeks in February of 1930. The events in Mazar received extensive attention and analysis in Soviet state documents. The record includes observations written by different observers at different points in the development of events, shedding light on the often obscured details of human interaction that lie behind the usually perfunctory state accounts of “mass disturbances” in Uzbekistan.

Obviously, the special attention that Mazar received itself indicates that the case was not entirely representative. The peasant “disturbances” there were among the largest and most protracted (though not the most violent) that would occur in response to collectivization, and the actions of the Soviet officials on the scene were deemed to be especially worthy of condemnation. Mazar itself seems to have been atypically sheltered from the Sovietization of the 1920s. It was located in the rugged mountains near the Fergana Valley’s Kyrgyz border, around 40 miles away from the raion center of Pap by a nearly impassable route. No sel’sovet had been established in the village until 1928.¹²⁰ The district to which Mazar belonged, Chust-Pap, had felt the reach of Soviet power but had proven to be a particularly resilient stronghold of traditionalism. As described by Douglas Northrop, the nearby town of Chust had been the site of a violent “minirevolt” against the unveiling campaign in April 1927, and the state’s policies toward women remained a flash point of contention in the region.¹²¹ In February of 1930, an Uzbek woman was arrested for agitating against unveiling, having spent the preceding months traveling throughout Chust-Pap raion urging men “not to unveil their wives, not to give [women] in marriage to

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 114.

¹²¹ Northrop 139-163.

workers of the apparatus, not to register through ZAGS [the Soviet office for the secular registration of marriages], not to go to the doctor [presumably for an official verification of a woman's age prior to marriage], but to arrange weddings according to the shariat."¹²² Even prior to the events in Mazar, the area had gained some notoriety as a center of recurrent resistance to Soviet policies.

Because of its near inaccessibility, Mazar was the last village of Chust-Pap raion to be reached by the policy of "total collectivization." On February 14, 1930, the sel'sovet chairman arranged a general village meeting, which, state sources note disapprovingly, included Mazar's "kulaks, sheiks, and *lishentsy*."¹²³ At the meeting, the peasants decided against forming a kolkhoz, and probably as a result of attempts to force them to do so, attacked the sel'sovet chairman and drove him out of the village, along with several other sel'sovet officials. After hearing of these events on February 17, the chairman of the RIK, an Uzbek by the name of Buribekov, issued an order for Uzbektorg (Uzbek Trading Agency) shops not to provide any goods to the residents of Mazar. He then ordered the arrest of six villagers, "considering them 'trouble-makers [*buzotery*]' and fearing that they might disrupt the organization of the kolkhoz in Mazar."¹²⁴ Under questioning, it emerged that two of the villagers were bedniaks, and they were quickly released; the remaining four were kept under guard.

On February 18, Buribekov arrived in Mazar with a few other officials and arranged a second meeting on collectivization – once again, a general meeting of villagers without differentiation by class. He lectured for three hours, during which time, according to the state report, "everybody listened," and then ended by inviting the villagers to produce a resolution in

¹²² *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 32, 113.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 110.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 111.

favor of forming a kolkhoz. After a few moments of dead silence, one of the “instructors” who had accompanied Buribekov to Mazar prompted the peasants that they should produce a resolution stating, “We, the bedniaks, batraks, and seredniaks, collectively and voluntarily enter the kolkhoz, and we will not allow into it any kulaks, sheiks, traders, or *lishentsy*.” After these words, chaos erupted:

A clamor was raised, shouts were heard saying, “We are all bedniaks, we don’t have any kulaks, bais, traders, and people like that,” and in general the meeting fell apart. Given the situation that had been created, Buribekov was unable to orient himself and take measures to restore the peace. In an indignant tone he began to shout and declare, “Then you are against the decision of the Sredazbiuro of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on the conduct of total collectivization.” The majority uttered, “Yes.” Buribekov then asked, “Who agrees with this?” The majority raised their hands. After this Buribekov shouted, “So you are against the organization of the kolkhoz,” the majority shouted “yes,” “Raise your hands,” the majority raised them. As a result of all this Buribekov told them: “This means that you are enemies of Soviet power and it must beware of you.” In this way the meeting was broken up.¹²⁵

What is most striking in this narrative is the way that the state official, through what appears to be a combination of inexperience, frustration, and mild panic in the face of a hostile peasant audience, essentially pushes the villagers toward a maximalist position. The use of the refrain “we have no kulaks,” as Lynne Viola notes, was a common peasant tactic for displaying village solidarity before the state and deflecting Soviet class policies; it was a form of resistance, but a mild one.¹²⁶ Out of peasants resisting the selective persecution of their fellow villagers, Buribekov made opponents of the entire collectivization policy, and finally, “enemies of Soviet power.” In this instance, as in many others during the first months of collectivization, it was the intransigence of state officials that closed off the possibility for engagement and collaboration

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Viola 88.

among the Uzbek peasants, instantly framing them as outsiders to the Soviet system and encouraging them to conceptualize legitimate Soviet politics as a sphere to which they did not and could not belong. A ready-made alternative, implicit in the periodic resistance to Soviet rule of the preceding years, was to belong instead to traditional Uzbek society in the capacity of opponents of state policy.

The peasants of Mazar did not rush toward this alternative, however. After the meeting was broken up, a crowd of 300 gathered in protest against collectivization, but their demands remained far from radical – “first to be taught literacy, then to form the kolkhoz.”¹²⁷ While it seems exceedingly likely that this demand was a stalling tactic that evaded the heart of the issue, the villagers continued to formulate their position as one of engagement with the state, in which compromises were proposed and the benign possibilities of Soviet rule highlighted. In the midst of the agitated and uncertain atmosphere in Mazar, Buribekov left, but after having gone a little ways apparently thought better of it, and sent policemen to arrest two “sheiks” who he felt had “particularly spoken out against the collective farm.”¹²⁸ The volatile situation in the village quickly ignited. First relatives, then the rest of the villagers came out to follow the arrested men, and a frightened Buribekov was compelled to set them free. But instead of returning home, the arrested men assumed leadership, “throwing themselves forward with a shout and calling on the entire village to follow them.”¹²⁹ The crowd moved on to the nearby town of Chadak, where they attacked a government building and liberated four arrested men (presumably the four imprisoned by Buribekov prior to the village meeting). When Buribekov arrived in the town after them, they forced him to sign a document saying that “until the investigation of this matter by special

¹²⁷ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 24, 84.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, no. 32, 111.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, no. 32, 112.

commission, none of the Mazar villagers will be arrested, and they will be allowed to return to the village.”¹³⁰ Strikingly, the peasants not only placed their trust in a signed document to protect themselves against agents of the state, but also appealed to a “special commission” to restore justice. Their effective use of intimidation against local officials suggests that they can hardly have been as orderly and tame as the dry language of the state documents would imply; yet they continued to envisage the goals of their resistance, if not within the strict bounds of Soviet legality, then within the framework of the Soviet system more generally.

By this point, however, the peasants’ discontent had developed its own internal momentum, and the stakes began to rise. Rather than returning home after extorting the signed document from Buribekov, the villagers selected “delegates” from their number, and especially from among the men who had been arrested, to travel to the raion center of Pap “with a complaint of incorrect action in being forced into kolkhozes.”¹³¹ Other residents of Mazar either stayed in Chadak or went to various other villages in the region, with the aim, according to state observers, of conducting “anti-soviet agitation” among the peasants, and the numbers of demonstrators began to grow. According to the report on the incident written afterward by okrug-level party officials, peasants from Mazar of all social classes participated in the disturbance, including bedniaks and seredniaks, while among the other villages, “exclusively the alien element” was persuaded to join them. However, the report also claimed that the Mazar villagers made use of threats to increase their numbers, saying that “if [the other peasants] did not go with them to Pap to complain about the actions of Buribekov and others, then on the way back they would rob their

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 24, 84. This document states that the delegates were sent to Kokand, a larger town in the Fergana Valley region, but a later and more detailed report of the events indicates the destination as Pap. See *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 112.

belongings and not allow them to have water, which passes through Mazar.”¹³² Nothing in this official explanation is inherently unbelievable: the *bais*, clergy, and other *lishentsy* certainly had a greater incentive to engage in resistance to the Soviet state than *bedniaks* and *batraks*, if nothing else than by virtue of being labeled an “alien element.” And it would be a mistake to dismiss out of hand the proposition that peasants, in the course of resisting the Soviet state, might have used coercion against one another as well as against state officials. But skepticism is in order given how closely this explanation matches the Communist Party’s ideological assumption that only “class enemies” would voluntarily resist collectivization – at least, without a provocation of the sort that Buribekov had provided to the *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* of Mazar.

In any case, as the crowd grew in size, its demands began to escalate. The Mazar peasants united with 100 residents of Khanabad, then another group of 500 demonstrators. The crowd stayed the night in the village of Gurum-Sarai, which was “seized by the same mood,” and the next day peasants from an additional three villages joined the mass. By February 20, two days after the village meeting with Buribekov, the movement had grown to 3500 peasant protestors, described in a state report as “extremely hostile.” Their demands now took on the systematic and increasingly comprehensive form that was characteristic of so many mass disturbances: the repeal of collectivization, the destruction of *kolkhoz* registration lists, the release of all those arrested, the restoration of rights to *lishentsy*, and finally, the restoration of the “old-method,” i.e. traditional Islamic, schools (*shkoly starogo metoda*).¹³³ These last two demands, in particular, indicate the growing scope of resistance among the Mazar peasants. Grievances against the state had been extended from the misdeeds of Buribekov, to the collectivization campaign more generally, to the policies of the entire period of Soviet rule.

¹³² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 112.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 24, 84.

Traditionalism was becoming a banner for peasant opposition. Local officials surrendered the kolkhoz registration lists, which the crowd destroyed, but were forced to flee when they could not fulfill the remaining demands. Many kolkhozniks from the surrounding villages also fled.

Finally, on February 21, the peasants arrived in Pap, where their demands once again mutated and expanded. They now called for the restoration of rights to *lishentsy*, the opening of old-method schools in the villages, the abolishment of ZAGS and return to traditional marriage rites, the legalization of free trade without the taxation of traders, and the establishment of kolkhozes on an exclusively voluntary basis.¹³⁴ Buribekov's coercive methods remained the central kernel of the peasants' grievances, and lodging a complaint against him remained the movement's underlying *raison d'être*, but the peasants had clearly adopted a less supplicant and more confrontational approach to the Soviet state. The protest against the state's use of compulsion in achieving its transformational aims was no longer envisioned as solely applicable to the experience of collectivization. Instead, collectivization became embedded in a larger narrative of the Soviet disruption of traditional ways of life in Uzbekistan, in which the issues of Islam, policies toward women, and economics all became polarized along a unitary axis of traditionalism versus Sovietization.¹³⁵ On one level, this meant a move toward a more intransigent position; the mood of the crowd had deteriorated considerably, and as their demand about free trade makes clear, they were no longer committed to seeking solutions that would have been possible without radical revisions to the Soviet system. Their "demands" were no longer parameters for compromise, but a blueprint for resistance. On another level, the peasants' framing of their own position relative to the state had shifted. By extending their demands to

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 113.

¹³⁵ Douglas Northrop theorizes Uzbek "traditionalism" as a set of practices and ideals formed through interaction with the Soviet state. These practices "became expressive of an un-Soviet, even *anti*-Soviet identity" in the context of the state's transformational projects, crowding out earlier tendencies of Islamic reformism and valorizing as representative of Uzbek cultural identity and authenticity the very practices that the state attacked. See Northrop, 171 and 346.

many of the most important policies that had characterized the previous years of Soviet rule, they were claiming affiliation with a traditionalist identity apart from and in opposition to the Soviet system. Resistance was becoming not simply a reaction to state methods, but a systematic ideology.

At the moment when tensions seemed the highest, however, the situation was resolved peacefully, in a way that suggests the tremendous fluidity of peasant relationships to the Soviet state during this period. Just as a violent clash seemed imminent, “almost by chance,” three prominent officials of the national level arrived in Pap – Alfred Lepa, the second secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, Petr Perkon, the chairman of the Uzbek GPU, and Faizulla Khojaev, the chairman of the Uzbek Sovnarkom.¹³⁶ The three had been dispatched to Fergana okrug to deal with the explosive situation there, as mass disturbances enveloped the region during late February. They found the situation in Pap on February 22 to be sufficiently dire that they called for armed forces to be dispatched at once, expressing fears that “the movement is growing into an uprising.”¹³⁷ A platoon of around twenty men arrived soon afterward. Yet while the presence of these troops was credited with helping to restrain peasant action, the party leadership was by this point determined to avoid any escalation in the situation. The Sredazbiuro had earlier advised the district officials that “by no means should they rush toward repressive measures, but should take measures exclusively of an explanatory character.”¹³⁸ Ultimately, it was such explanatory measures in the form of a “skillful appearance” by Faizulla Khojaev that succeeded

¹³⁶ Khojaev, as mentioned above, was an Uzbek; Lepa and Perkon were Latvians. All three would later be executed during Stalin’s Great Terror of 1937-38.

¹³⁷ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 25, 86.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 39, 142.

in defusing the situation, and the participants in the demonstration gradually began to disperse and return to their homes.¹³⁹

This seeming rapid reversal in peasant attitudes, from demanding radical modifications to the Soviet system at one moment to being subdued by mild official oratory the next, is chalked up in official accounts to a split between the hard core of “class enemy” oppositionists and the masses of poor peasants, who merely reacted situationally to local “excesses.” Once the minor grievances of the peasant masses had been addressed, the class enemies who had incited the disturbance lost their base of support:

The crowd was raised under the slogan, “We don’t need the kolkhoz.” But when comrades Faizulla Khojaev and Lepa explained to them that the kolkhoz movement is an exclusively voluntary movement, that nobody is forcing anybody, the ground was knocked out from under the legs of the organizers of this ferment, and the crowd calmed down.¹⁴⁰

Almost without a doubt, there were among the crowd both hard-line traditionalists and individuals who had only been goaded into acts of resistance by the coercive methods of Buribekov and others like him. But it may also be supposed that it was not always possible to draw this line so clearly. The Uzbek traditionalist program was always available as a conceptual alternative to Sovietization that might be provisionally picked up or set aside in response to the changing threats and opportunities presented by the state. When Faizulla Khojaev came before the crowd and “accepted several complaints” and “promised to look into those complaints and take corresponding measures,” he not only addressed the minor issue of Buribekov’s “excesses” but offered a comprehensively new paradigm of relations between the state and the Uzbek

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 25, 87.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 39, 142.

peasantry.¹⁴¹ Khojaev's personal role in this event raises intriguing questions: as one of the most successful representatives of Soviet indigenization policies, did he signify for the peasants an Uzbek face for Soviet rule at the highest levels and thus the possibilities of integration, personal advancement, and non-traditional Uzbek identity within the Soviet system? Whatever the case, while not addressing each specific demand from the side of the peasants, he treated their demands in general as if they were petitions for governmental redress rather than the slogans of "enemies of Soviet power." In the process, he encouraged the peasants of Mazar and Chust-Pap raion to conceptualize the state as a responsive appellate arena for their complaints, and more importantly, to conceptualize themselves as citizens legitimately participating in the Soviet system. The grievances of the peasantry connected with the traditionalist program did not disappear, but they became once again the objects of everyday forms of struggle rather than the core of an identity that placed the peasants outside of and in perpetual struggle with Soviet rule.

In the end, then, the peasants accepted an arrangement that corresponded to their initial demands rather than their rhetoric at the height of the conflict with the state. They obtained from Khojaev a virtual invitation to abandon the collective farms, and in the following weeks the kolkhozes in Mazar and the surrounding villages collapsed. They also achieved, if not a significant transformation of the Soviet system, then at least a considerable reconstitution of state power as they experienced it in their day-to-day lives. Buribekov was removed from his post, excluded from the Communist Party, and brought to trial for his "gross distortion of the directives of the party." That "distortion" included his coercive methods among the peasants of Mazar, but more specifically his failure to apply a class principle to coercion: he was guilty of "not taking measures toward the removal of kulaks, sheiks, and *lishentsy* from the meeting, thanks to which

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the meeting was broken up and these events occurred.”¹⁴² A large number of other officials from Chust-Pap and surrounding districts were subjected to similar treatment. By early March of 1930, a wave of re-elections was slated for the sel’sovet in Chust-Pap and other Fergana Valley districts.¹⁴³ The Central Asian party leadership embarked on an immediate program of broadly propagandizing the principle of voluntarism in collectivization and attempting to repair the state’s legitimacy at a local level by seeking a new contingent of indigenous cadres for the region who would “guarantee a correct class line in their work.”¹⁴⁴

The resolution of the crisis in Mazar and the surrounding villages of Chust-Pap raion rested, first, on the specific state concessions that addressed the initial causes of the peasant demonstrations, and second, on the new model of peasant-state relations that lessened the attraction of a traditionalist identity totally apart from the Soviet state. When this new relationship was threatened, conflict could easily erupt once more. A few relatively peaceful weeks after the end of the Mazar mass movement, the OGPU arrived in the villages to arrest the “ring-leaders [*zachinshchiki*]” of the peasant actions, thereby not only resurrecting the specter of state coercion and interference in peasant life, but also threatening to delegitimize peasant gains after the demonstration and criminalize those who had brought their demands before the state. In Mazar, a crowd of 150 gathered and secured the immediate release of the suspects; in Gurum-Sarai, a crowd of 300 severely beat an OGPU official, as well as two Soviet officials responsible for the sowing campaign, and destroyed the sel’sovet building.¹⁴⁵ These OGPU actions were retrospectively dubbed “mistakes” by the party leadership, and the state’s conciliatory position, however tenuous, remained in place. But during collectivization, peasant relationships with the

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 32, 116.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 45, 161.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 39, 145.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 31, 105-106.

state were in continuous flux as Soviet power alternately held out inducements to at least partial integration and sought to penalize anything but the fullest participation. Uzbek peasants moved along a continuum of engagement and disengagement with the state in accordance with the perceived benefits and dangers that it afforded. When collaboration grew too costly, resistance to collectivization could become the vessel for an increasingly maximalist, programmatic set of traditionalist demands that offered peasants a shared identity as opponents of Sovietization. When the state enforced a retreat to moderation, many peasants once again found a viable, though still incredibly fragile, living space within the framework of the Soviet system – a provisional consent to live under Soviet power, a wary role in defining the acceptable limits of state action, and the distant outlines of a new identity as the *bedniak* and *seredniak* beneficiaries of the Communist Party's class policies.

CHAPTER IV

PATTERNS OF PEASANT AFFILIATION

The case of Mazar demonstrates how a program of traditionalism, defined in opposition to the Soviet policies of the 1920s, could be used by peasants in framing alternatives to Soviet rule. But it also demonstrates that a one-dimensional opposition between tradition and Sovietization was by no means the only way that peasants conceptualized resistance or viewed their relationship with Soviet power. Deriving the mentalities of peasant actors from state accounts is an extremely problematic task for historians under the best of circumstances. Even when there seems to be no clear advantage for an official in deliberately misrepresenting peasant attitudes, special skepticism must be applied to accounts that clearly reproduce Soviet ideological expectations. State reports describing the “moods,” motivations, and even words of peasants may reflect the assumptions and institutional priorities of the observers as much as the beliefs of the peasants themselves. In the case of Uzbekistan, an additional layer of mediation is added by the language barrier. Peasants would have overwhelmingly addressed one another in Uzbek or another non-Russian language of the region, while in the state documents their words are reported exclusively in Russian. It is not at all clear who carried out these translations or under what circumstances they did so. Any conclusions about the mentalities of Uzbek peasants, then, must be extremely tentative and remain open to revision.

Nevertheless, a few preliminary conclusions about Uzbek peasant mentalities may be posited. When peasants responded to collectivization, they did so in the context of competing standards of self-identification and affiliation set forward by village life, the traditionalist program, and the new Soviet class-based order. Stephen Kotkin’s arguments about the formation

of identities in the very different context of industrial Magnitogorsk provide a useful point of comparison. Whereas Kotkin argues that the mostly Russian, urban citizens of Magnitogorsk lacked both the independent sources of identity and the conceptual alternatives to Soviet rule that would permit “radical unbelief” in the Soviet system, such total alternatives to Soviet power are not at all unusual in the rhetoric of Uzbek peasants (or of Russian peasants, for that matter) resisting collectivization.¹⁴⁶ As Douglas Northrop points out, “Despite Moscow’s undeniable power by 1930, Uzbek men and women were still quite capable of stepping back and seeing Soviet power from outside.”¹⁴⁷ They maintained a whole array of non-Soviet patterns of self-identification and belonging – whether centering on the village community, on Islam, or on non-Russian ethnicity – that both provided nuclei around which group resistance could coalesce and permitted individuals to find meaningful social roles outside the confines of the Soviet system.

As the story of Mazar suggests, however, the possibility of radical unbelief did not mean that it was the option that peasants most often chose. It would be too much to argue that Uzbek peasants were “speaking Bolshevik,” in Kotkin’s terms, by the early 1930s, but his description of how individuals “played the game” of using Soviet terms of self-identification, “whether out of self-interest, or fear, or both,” hits close to the mark in the ways that peasants gradually accommodated themselves to collectivization.¹⁴⁸ Although peasant mentalities maintained a considerable level of independence from the Soviet state discourse of class relations, many Uzbek peasants appear to have rapidly learned the skill of adopting the language of class selectively, first of all in presenting themselves before the state, but ultimately in defining a new and participatory position in the Soviet village order under collectivization.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 220-225.

¹⁴⁷ Northrop 174.

¹⁴⁸ Kotkin 222.

Drawing and Redrawing the Bounds of Community: The Village, Women, Islam, and Ethnicity

Despite the failure of the Soviet projects of the 1920s – land reform, unveiling, the campaign against Islam – to destroy the foundations of traditionalism in Central Asia, Soviet power had raised sweeping new questions about how communities would be defined in the region. On the one hand, the confrontational nature of state campaigns created, or at least deepened, a set of binary oppositions – Soviet and traditional, Islamic and secular, native and Russian – that would be used in drawing up a traditionalist program of resistance and solidifying the cohesion of peasant resistance to the state. On the other hand, policies like indigenization and the state’s active courtship of Uzbek women and poor peasants suggested new forms of affiliation in which a privileged position in the Soviet system would be granted in return for collaboration with the state against the old religious, political, and economic elite. Peasant responses to collectivization both highlighted some of the long-term patterns of belief and identity in rural Uzbekistan and demonstrated their underlying flexibility, their ability to coexist with alternative identities and to adapt to new opportunities.

Since the beginning of the unveiling campaign in 1927, the Soviet state had hoped to use its policies toward women to redraw the lines of affiliation and solidarity in Uzbekistan. By mobilizing Muslim women as an oppressed stratum in Central Asia, Gregory Massell argues, Soviet theorists hoped to gain a popular base of support for the regime within native society and thus break down the tight community bonds that tended to block the penetration of state policy and ideology into everyday life.¹⁴⁹ Despite the meager success of these measures, party leaders continued to see a redefinition of allegiances among peasant women as closely interconnected with the success of collectivization in the Uzbek countryside. In January of 1930, the Sredazbiuro issued a statement calling for the “mobilization and activization of broad masses of

¹⁴⁹ Massell, Introduction.

bedniak and seredniak women for a decisive movement in favor of collectivization and against the kulak-bai elements.”¹⁵⁰ The party envisioned a mutually reinforcing relationship between collectivization and the emancipation of women: the interests of emancipated women would unite them with the state against their old “oppressors” in the campaign of dekulakization, while their incorporation into public economic life through kolkhozes and silk-producing cooperatives would contribute further to their independence from the traditional family unit.¹⁵¹

The state’s emphasis on the link between collectivization and the emancipation of women encouraged Uzbek peasants to conceptualize their resistance on the same terms. Slogans against the Soviet policies prohibiting child marriage, bride price, and the veiling of women accompanied several protests against collectivization. In other instances, like the mass demonstrations in Mazar, protestors called for the restoration of customary or shariat marriage rites.¹⁵² The International Women’s Day holiday on March 8, celebrated in Uzbekistan with state-organized meetings and demonstrations in favor of women’s emancipation, provided the pretext for a number of peasant counter-demonstrations against collectivization in 1930.¹⁵³ More intriguingly, peasant rumor tended to highlight the full range of lurid possibility contained in this association between the state’s policies toward women and collectivization. In one case (dubbed “excessive” by reviewing authorities), a seredniak was arrested for asking at a village meeting, “Is it true that in kolkhozes wives will be collectivized?”¹⁵⁴ As Lynne Viola notes, the myth of the “common blanket,” which associated the socialization of private property with the creation of a public

¹⁵⁰ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 110, 315.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 36, 133.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 38, 138.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 129, 367.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 40, 147.

sexuality, was characteristic of peasant resistance to collectivization throughout the USSR.¹⁵⁵ But it gained a special potency in the case of Uzbekistan, where collectivization followed and was explicitly tied to a policy of bringing women out of the veil and the seclusion of the private home and into public life. The fears that this association raised regarding the integrity of the family unit and the potential “defection” of women found expression in rumors that under collectivization, the beautiful wives and daughters of kulaks would be “expropriated,” either for use by Russian Red Army soldiers, or by Uzbek batraks and bedniaks.¹⁵⁶

As fantastic as these fears seem, they did possess an analogue, however limited, in real life. In conjunction with the deportation of kulaks, a state report described the “mass” phenomenon of kulaks’ wives requesting divorce in August of 1931. The availability of easy divorce for Uzbek women was itself a consequence of Soviet policy, often vigorously opposed by traditionalist elements in the population, and the readiness of women to pursue this option might signal their decision to adopt at least the appearance of Sovietization in order to gain membership in the Soviet community rather than exile alongside their husbands.¹⁵⁷ According to the report, “Some of these wives express a desire to go to school, and others want to marry bedniak-kolkhozniks.” In at least one case, a woman was said to have appealed not only to the Soviet state’s liberated ideal, but also to its discourse of cultural transformation: “By decision of the political commission, one kulak’s wife was released. She declared: ‘I will try to liquidate my illiteracy and break with the old way of life [*porvat’ so starym bytom*].’ Right there at the collection point, this woman took off her veil.”¹⁵⁸ The specific inducements that the state offered to Uzbek women created opportunities for them to redefine their community allegiances, and

¹⁵⁵ Viola 46.

¹⁵⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 278, 152; t. 1, No. 114, 328.

¹⁵⁷ Massell, Chapter 9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 37-38.

even their family ties, in ways that were not always possible for men. Of course, it also created the opportunity for more than a little subterfuge and the use of Soviet principles for purposes contrary to the state's intentions. The report acknowledges that in some cases a woman's decision to pursue a divorce was initiated by her husband, who might hope to preserve some of his property while in exile or who might simply reason that it would be easier to flee without the burden of a family. But while under Islamic law obtaining a divorce was much easier for a man than for a woman, in this case Uzbek men and women, seemingly deliberately, opted for a legal, Soviet-style divorce – one that additionally carried the connotation of a woman's "liberation" from her kulak husband. Very likely, such divorces were carried out either for the concrete legal benefits they would provide for the wife, or simply for the benefit of state observers.

Yet during the early months of 1930, the most common response of Uzbek women was to reject the new identities offered by the state and instead to assume an active role in peasant resistance to collectivization. The special role of women in staging resistance was characteristic of collectivization throughout the Soviet Union. Women's position at the forefront of resistance movements could act, according to Lynne Viola, as "a possible deterrent to violence or, failing that, a less ostensibly politicized mode of confrontation with Soviet power," a tactic by which official assumptions about peasant women's emotionality and susceptibility to kulak influence could be used as a shield against state reprisals.¹⁵⁹ Probably partially for this reason, women's demonstrations in Uzbekistan were among the quickest to advocate violence. They often came armed with sticks, axes, and shovels and called for the beating or murder of local officials, which in a few instances they carried out.¹⁶⁰ But the particular way in which women's allegiances were contested in Central Asia during this time lent their role as leaders of peasant resistance added

¹⁵⁹ Viola 198.

¹⁶⁰ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 15, 60; t. 1, No. 70, 227.

layers of political meaning. During February and March of 1930, women acted as some of the primary enforcers of village solidarity against the state. In various cases, they marched under the slogan “Death to activists,” threatened to attack kolkhozniks or burn down the homes of collaborationist bedniaks, and forced other women in the village to participate in their demonstrations under the threat of exile.¹⁶¹ Predictably, Communist Party leaders read these events in terms of the attempts to redefine women’s allegiances since 1927, but it is possible that Uzbek peasants also imagined them in these terms. The prominent role of Uzbek women in ensuring that nobody in the village broke ranks could act as a highly conspicuous repudiation of the Soviet efforts to sow divisions in the Uzbek countryside, instead asserting an alternative model of absolute solidarity within the village community. This appeal to unity and mutual support at the level of the village, like the appeal to traditionalism, did not last forever, and it is better seen as a way that peasants conceptualized and systematized their resistance to collectivization than as an immutable characteristic of Uzbek peasant life. Nonetheless, it served as a vision of community that provided a model for resistance to the state and openly disputed the power of the Soviet system to redefine peasant identities.

Although the state’s attempts to mobilize women were unique to Central Asia, its attempts to divide the village along class lines were not, and as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, peasants asserted village solidarity as an alternative to Soviet class policies. In part, especially during early 1930, the appeal to village solidarity stemmed as much from real fears about the future of *seredniaks* and *bedniaks* as from a rejection of class divisions on principle. The incredible arbitrariness with which power was applied on a local level during these months bred deep uncertainty and speculation about the government’s ultimate aims. Bais targeted with *dekulakization* warned other peasants about “the gradualness [*postepenost*] of the Bolsheviks’

¹⁶¹ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 45, 205; *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 36, 133; t. 1, No. 56, 204; t. 1, No. 38, 138.

measures,” summarized in the widespread rumor: “Soviet power has begun by robbing the bais, then it will move on to the seredniaks, and finally it will take away everything from the bedniaks.”¹⁶² Even after the class basis for state persecution had become more well-established and systematic, these fears might resurface, as they did during the mass deportations of kulaks. One report describes the eerie scene in a village during September of 1931, as a sense of dread descended on the peasant population in connection with the first days of the deportations. The mosques were filled to the brim with an unprecedented number of worshippers, while the public spaces were deserted, and the tea houses “were even closed from the lack of customers.”¹⁶³ Displays of village solidarity were not entirely driven by a shared sense of fear, however, and some poor peasants spoke up to defend bais even when doing so required a measure of courage. The actions of peasants in Mazar and elsewhere have already been noted, from demanding a restoration of rights to *lishentsy* to resisting a kolkhoz order that excluded kulaks. In 1931, after the decline of the mass public demonstrations against collectivization, bedniaks might participate in petitions on behalf of the bais, arguing that they had been labeled as such in error and calling for their release.¹⁶⁴ Whether coalescing against a common threat or acting out of a sense of loyalty fostered by longer-term community bonds, peasants asserted a village order in which peasant and not Soviet patterns of affiliation would predominate.

At the height of peasant resistance in February and March of 1930, peasants sought to reconstitute the government at a local level according to the priorities of the village community through re-elections of the sel’sovets. The call for such re-elections cropped up periodically among the litany of peasant demands that characterized the mass demonstrations, and as noted

¹⁶² *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 266, 132; t. 1, No. 116, 336.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 266, 133.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 33-34.

above, elections were eventually granted, albeit on the state's terms.¹⁶⁵ This strain of peasant politics seems to suggest an ambiguous mix – the basic acceptance of the authority of the sel'sovet alongside a demand for greater peasant dominance in village politics. In Fergana okrug in late February of 1930, for instance, a village demonstration of around 400 people began by “threatening the overthrow of Soviet power” and ended by demanding the re-election of the sel'sovet.¹⁶⁶ It is not clear whether the peasants in question conceptualized these aims as distinct, and whether the replacement of state-approved officials with peasant-approved ones was seen as a mode of coexisting with the Soviet system or of rejecting it altogether. When the state failed to sanction immediate re-elections, peasants in several regions resorted to “self-directed” or “unauthorized” (*samovol'nye*) re-elections, which could reflect both an assertion of village autonomy and a willingness to operate within the framework of Soviet rule. In Fergana okrug in particular, villagers elected individuals whom state documents overwhelmingly describe as former members and leaders of the basmachi resistance.¹⁶⁷ It may be that such ties to the basmachi movement were exaggerated, or that these individuals simply represented natural leaders among the peasantry. But if peasants were deliberately electing leaders of the basmachi movement to positions of power, it suggests a quite purposeful defiance of the Soviet state and a decision to congregate around an identity of long-term resistance. In a different case, however, this time in Surkhan-darya okrug, alternative patterns of affiliation continued to be envisioned within the context of legitimate Soviet authority. In the course of two village meetings, peasants voted to remove the local kolkhoz director and sel'sovet chairman and elected in their place “kulak sympathizers [*podkulachniki*].” But a few days later, “Eight delegates from this village

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 51, 178.

¹⁶⁶ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 45, 204.

¹⁶⁷ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, no. 35, 131; t. 1, No. 51, 181.

appeared at the RIK and tried to secure a confirmation of the decisions of these meetings, threatening otherwise in the name of 200 kolkhozniks to not carry out the sowing and to abandon the village.”¹⁶⁸ While such threats seem drastic, the peasants’ underlying intention seems to have been to facilitate a compromise with the state, to ensure that their demands were heard and to assert their position as active participants in negotiations with the state rather than as passive victims of its policies. The underlying impulse was to restore a degree of peasant autonomy without bringing about a wholesale rupture with the Soviet authorities. In this way, Uzbek peasants asserted the long-standing structures of village affiliation as an alternative to the patterns of association advocated by the state, and as a source of identity that was independent of Soviet power without necessarily contradicting it.

Islamic religion offered Uzbek peasants a still broader sense of community and shared belief outside the confines of, though not always in direct opposition to, the Soviet state. Already during the tsarist era, Islam had appeared in oppositional movements as a ready standard for dividing the native community from the Russian colonists, and under Soviet rule this contrast was heightened by the state’s confrontational anti-religious stance in the 1920s.¹⁶⁹ In fact, however, the state’s assault on religion in Uzbekistan had been toned down by the time of collectivization, and unlike in Russia, direct confrontations over religion in 1930 were rare. A few mass peasant demonstrations in Bukhara and Andijan okrugs arose when workers’ brigades drove away Uzbek peasants praying at mosques and cemeteries, “not allowing them to complete religious rites, citing the instructions of the Soviet government.”¹⁷⁰ And, as land reform shaded gradually into dekulakization, shariat law was again invoked to condemn expropriation. One sel’sovet chairman

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 28, 99.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), Chapter 14.

¹⁷⁰ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 37, 137.

(almost certainly removed from his post afterward) lectured batraks in Khorezm okrug, “It is not lawful and not Muslim to take from one and give to another.”¹⁷¹ For the most part, though, peasant demands regarding Islam, such as the restoration of old-method schools and the return of *waqf* property to the mosques, were founded in pre-existing grievances that were being revived in the course of mass opposition to the state.¹⁷²

Even entirely apart from its religious content, the institutional framework of Islam, to the extent that it continued to exist in the Uzbek countryside, could be a key factor in facilitating peasant self-organization. Mosques were routinely the site of public sermons, discussions, and plans in favor of peasant action against collectivization, and they could even be the location of secret peasant meetings.¹⁷³ In 1930, increased mosque attendance acted as a catalyst for heightened resistance to collectivization during the Uraza festival marking the end of Ramadan. Inconveniently for the Soviet state, this holiday fell at the end of February that year, just as resistance was overtaking entire districts in Uzbekistan.¹⁷⁴ Official state analysis unanimously attributes the importance of mosques in structuring peasant resistance to the Islamic clergy’s innate hostility to Soviet power. But beyond this, in purely practical terms, as Shoshana Keller argues, mosques functioned as “independent venues for discussion and religious expression,” as a distinctly non-Soviet public sphere that was comparatively sheltered from the scrutiny of outsiders, providing a space for the expression of opposition that was simply not available in any

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 107, 304. The arguments used in another case strayed further from Islamic orthodoxy, but to similar effect: “If the land commission gives you land from Ishan Abduvakhit, you should not take it, because this ishan is a sorcerer and whoever takes his land will see all of his children die and his harvest lost.” *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 106, 300.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 15, 60; No. 35, 130; No. 51, 181.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 261, 77.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 25, 86.

other forum.¹⁷⁵ On a more symbolic level, the mosque offered clearly delimited boundaries to a peasant community of shared belief and identity that remained wholly independent of the structures of the Soviet state.

Membership in the Islamic community was occasionally posed as fundamentally incompatible with membership in the Soviet system and imagined as a total alternative to Soviet power. One peasant, speaking before a group of believers in a mosque, argued that the primary loyalties of Uzbeks should lie with Islam rather than the secular state: “Every honest Muslim must keep in mind that this government is temporary. God will grant that in a short time we will see the flag of the true faith of Muhammad and the Muslim people flying over our minarets.”¹⁷⁶ Without advocating violent resistance against the state, this peasant thus conceptualized the place of the “honest Muslim” as aloof from the Soviet system, essentially separate from it rather than integrated into it. Handwritten posters pasted around Andijan okrug similarly appealed for an end to coexistence with Soviet (or Russian) power, this time drawing on a sense of international Islamic community: “In the name of the men of Afghanistan, you are called to adhere to the Muslim religious and not live with non-believers.”¹⁷⁷ On one religious holiday in Fergana okrug in March 1930, a Muslim prayer service spawned an agitated crowd that eventually expanded to 1500 peasants, all set on a confrontation with agents of state power. As the crowd grew more and more prone to violence, members of the clergy declared, “Whoever dies on this holiday will be holy and will go to heaven.”¹⁷⁸ By envisioning a world beyond the bounds of the Soviet Union, whether temporally, geographically, or spiritually, Uzbeks were able to find an anchor for distinctly non-Soviet forms of identity.

¹⁷⁵ Keller 175.

¹⁷⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 107, 308.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 51, 179.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Perhaps surprisingly, though, this theme – the theme of struggle for an Islamic society separate from, or even at war with, Soviet power – emerges only rarely in accounts of resistance to collectivization in Uzbekistan. This may simply reflect a limitation in state sources, which could not always access peasant ideas and rhetoric and may have had particular difficulty in penetrating peasant religious ideology. At the same time, the rarity of intransigence stemming from an Islamic identity is consistent with the idea that old and new forms of affiliation could overlap, that identities were subject to constant revisions and tests of their limits during the period of collectivization. Islam might periodically emerge as a banner for total resistance and an imagined alternative to the Soviet state, but more often peasants struggled to preserve their identity as Muslims without placing themselves outside the bounds of Soviet society. Even the peasant movement of 1500 people mentioned above, which congregated under the call for martyrdom in the battle against the Soviet state, ended by settling for much more limited aims: the only result recorded in the state report is that the crowd obtained the kolkhoz registration lists and tore them to shreds.¹⁷⁹ Islam provided Uzbek peasants with a source of identity independent of Soviet power that both acted to bolster resistance and, in its firmly non-Soviet ideological content and system of social organization, constituted an alternative to the Soviet system in its own right. But, probably more from necessity than from a desire to compromise with state anti-religious ideology, the primary aim of peasant resistance on religious grounds was to carve out a space for a Muslim identity within the larger framework of Soviet power.

In fact, Islam seems to have constituted one of the most stable foundations for self-identification among Uzbek peasants during the collectivization era, and while peasant ideas about the possibilities of accommodation with the Soviet state may have shifted, their identity as Muslims did not. Ethnicity, by contrast, was a category in which peasant identities in Soviet

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Central Asia were far from fixed, as pre-existing concepts of ethnic unity intersected with the colonial experiences of the tsarist era and the new Soviet nationalities that the state had begun to champion in 1924. The colonial heritage in Uzbekistan continued to haunt Soviet policy-makers in spite of their concerted efforts for indigenization, and collectivization made the dangers of the failure to overcome the past particularly vivid. In spite of the fact that most of the state officials that peasants would encounter on a day-to-day basis were Uzbeks or other Central Asian nationalities, any perceived inequality, injustice, or imbalance in ethnic representation could provoke a resurrection of the old colonial-era conceptual division between “Russians” and “natives.”¹⁸⁰ In Surkhan-darya okrug in May of 1930, a Russian observer bemoaned the local shortcomings in indigenization, exemplified by a failure to properly make use of the talents of Uzbek individuals:

By chance, I began to speak to a young Uzbek at the RIK, who in conversation revealed a mature understanding of the current situation. I was extremely surprised when he told me his job – janitor of the RIK. It turns out that this janitor has completed a two-year pedagogical course in Termez and is a member of the Komsomol... What should we call this situation, when a native Uzbek with an education is used in the capacity of a janitor...?¹⁸¹

In the context of Turkmenistan, Adrienne Edgar discovered that the gap between what was promised and what was achieved by indigenization provoked resentment and entrenched a sense of conflict between “Europeans” and Turkmen, a situation that was mirrored in the Uzbek SSR.¹⁸² Even worse from the point of the view of the peasant population were the constant arrivals of traveling Russian agitators and agronomists in connection with the cotton campaign. The sowing of cotton rather than cereal crops in Uzbekistan had been the basis of the region’s colonial

¹⁸⁰ Pierce, Chapter 18.

¹⁸¹ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 78, 239.

¹⁸² Edgar 79-80.

economy during the tsarist era, and the predominance of Russians in promoting the same policy during the Soviet period only strengthened the conviction among the peasant population that sowing cotton was fundamentally a “Russian” policy, undertaken for the benefit of Russians.¹⁸³

Dekulakization, too, elicited associations with colonialism in the minds of many Uzbek peasants. As the state’s attempts to garner the active participation of the poor peasants in the process of dekulakization from 1931 on threatened a split within the village community along class lines, peasant rumors proposed an alternative division according to nationality, presenting the deportation of kulaks as the preparatory stage of a systematic program of colonization and Russification in Uzbekistan. In Fergana okrug, peasants were overheard saying, “The Russians came and they are deporting Uzbeks. Why are they taking only Uzbeks? The leaders of the government are enemies of the Uzbek people, they want to make Muslims into Russians.”¹⁸⁴

Near the city of Samarkand, peasants discussed dekulakization as “a measure directed against Uzbeks with the goal of devastating the country,” and turned this claim into a call for unified peasant action against the state: the OGPU report describes a “mood” in the region that “those remaining must take up arms, attack Soviet institutions, and go to battle.” As in the case of appeals to Islamic unity, however, little seems to have come of this “mood.” Elsewhere, peasants speculated that the deportation of “Muslim” kulaks was merely intended to make room for a new wave of Russian colonists. According to one striking formulation of this theory, “In the place of Uzbek kulaks they will send Russian kulaks.”¹⁸⁵ Whether through misunderstanding or by design, the class basis for Soviet policies was denied, and state actions were instead viewed through the colonial lens of Uzbek victims and Russian beneficiaries. To some extent, equating

¹⁸³ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 78, 239.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 35.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 266, 130.

Soviet power with colonialism was simply one part of the rhetoric of peasant victimization at the hands of the state, existing side-by-side with sentiments like, “The government [*vlast*] are bloodsuckers: first they took money, now they’re taking people.”¹⁸⁶ But it also represented a more specific discourse of self-identification and exclusion, in which shared ethnicity and shared victimization at the hands of Russians were advanced as the foundations for community solidarity against Russian “outsiders.”

For the most part, these appeals to ethnicity adhered to the binary framework of the colonial division between “Russians” and “natives”: the terms “Soviet” and “Russian” were occasionally used interchangeably, and “Uzbek” and “Muslim” routinely were. The precise parameters of the “native” ethnic community under discussion were generally not defined. Only very rarely did a sentiment appear that might be described as “nationalism.” In Andijan, one mass demonstration of 2500 participants gathered under demands for the dissolution of *kolkhozes*, the return of land confiscated during the land reform, the freedom to practice religious rites, but also, uncharacteristically, “the independence of the nation [*natsiia*].”¹⁸⁷ Even in this case, it is unclear whether the peasants had in mind an independent Uzbekistan under the Soviet borders as they were created in 1924, an independent Turkestan, as some Central Asian intellectuals had envisioned at the time of the Revolution, or simply some form of local village independence hinging on the non-interference of Russian officials. A much more concrete and politicized vision of national independence was set forth in the program of *Batyr Gapchilar*, a secret Uzbek “counter-revolutionary organization” in Fergana okrug between November 1929 and January 1930.¹⁸⁸ According to an OGPU report, the organization conducted weekly meetings

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, no. 56, 201.

¹⁸⁸ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 255-256.

under the platform: “The Soviet system does not secure the political and economic life of the formerly colonial nationalities. In place of the Soviet system, the Uzbeks must create a state organization similar to Switzerland, providing for their political and economic independence and future development.” This organization’s adoption of the category of “Uzbek,” which had existed only vaguely prior to the state-sponsored national delimitation of 1924, as an object of primary loyalty and identity suggests the way in which not only traditionalism, but also relatively new forms of identity shaped by the experience of Soviet rule, could become tools in peasant attempts to define concrete alternatives to the Soviet system.¹⁸⁹

Even more surprisingly, peasants might adopt the ethno-national identities that the state had actively promoted since 1924 in framing disputes not only with Russians, but with members of other indigenous nationalities. The Fergana Valley, by virtue of its complex border with both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, possessed a decidedly ethnically mixed character, as well as a history of conflict between nomadic and sedentary populations over scarce land.¹⁹⁰ But it was not unusual for the deep-rooted Russian/native distinction, in conjunction with the broader collectivization era opposition between state and peasant, to override these more specific identities in the context of mass resistance to collectivization. Mazar, for instance, encompassed a population that was a combination of Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Kipchaks, and yet “the entire population,” in the words of the most detailed report on the events there, participated in the demonstrations against Soviet power.¹⁹¹ Not far away, in the village of Bachkir in Bagdad raion, however, resistance played out differently. A demonstration of 400 peasants ended when police

¹⁸⁹ On pre-Soviet ethnic identities, see Daniel Brower, “Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Colonial Policy in Turkestan,” in *Russia's Orient*, ed. Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzarini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). 128-130. Douglas Northrop describes the way in which a specifically Uzbek national identity that was at least partially constructed by Soviet “nation-building” became a point of peasant self-identification in resistance to unveiling. Northrop 67-68, 325.

¹⁹⁰ Pylev 59-60.

¹⁹¹ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 32, 112-114.

fired warning shots into the air, and the peasants were forced to disperse. The peasants closed off the entrance to their village and, in the words of a state report, “they especially will not let in Europeans.”¹⁹² Only a few days later, however, the lines of ethnic conflict had shifted, and renewed activity in Bachkir proceeded under the slogan, “Beat the Uzbek officials, don’t touch the Russians.”¹⁹³ This startling reversal goes entirely unexplained in the state report, but it was mirrored in another incident, this time in Andijan okrug. Uzbek and Kyrgyz peasants had participated jointly in a rather violent anti-collectivization riot in which a schoolteacher was murdered and several local officials were beaten. According to the OGPU description of the incident, however, the Kyrgyz were “much more aggressively disposed than the Uzbeks,” and had “expressed the intention to slaughter Communists, Uzbeks, and Russians.”¹⁹⁴ It is instructive that in both of these cases, the Kyrgyz pigeonholed Uzbeks with other “outsider” representatives of state power. This may reflect the impact of indigenization policy in ethnically mixed border regions of Uzbekistan, where Uzbeks were selectively promoted to positions within the local administration even over predominantly Kyrgyz communities. Incidents like these tended to go unexamined in official sources, however, so information on how and why such interethnic conflict developed is almost non-existent. Nevertheless, it seems clear that in the circumstances of active resistance to collectivization, the boundaries of ethnic identity remained provisional and subject to revision, as peasants appealed to a united community of “natives” against Russian officials at one moment and to a more limited Kyrgyz community in a struggle against Uzbeks the next.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 24, 85.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 25, 86.

¹⁹⁴ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 83, 253.

The Soviet state's efforts to reshape peasant communities in Uzbekistan collided with a series of alternative identities and patterns of affiliation – peasant, religious, and ethnic – that possessed broad appeal and deep resonance among Uzbek peasants but that were nonetheless flexible. The existence of such widespread conceptual alternatives to membership in the Soviet state did, as Douglas Northrop argues, provide Uzbek peasants with a channel for intransigent, totalistic resistance to Soviet power; but this approach was adopted only rarely.¹⁹⁵ More often, peasant identities were non-Soviet without being anti-Soviet, and in some cases, they had emerged in the context of the previous decade of Sovietization, even if not always in the ways originally intended by policymakers. While certain core elements of these identities remained non-negotiable, Uzbek peasants nevertheless modified their priorities and redrew the lines of their allegiances in response to the rapidly fluctuating balance of power in the countryside and the erratic invitations issued by the state to full participation in the Soviet project. When the state finally flung the doors wide open for *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* and slammed them in the faces of the *kulaks*, these identities again came under dispute, and peasants were left searching for compromise, even selectively taking on specifically Soviet identities, at the same time as they resisted total assimilation.

The Limits of Solidarity and the Limits of Collaboration: The Class Principle and Peasant Participation

During the land reform of 1925-26, the Soviet leadership in Uzbekistan had sought to destroy peasant solidarity in the village and to replace it with a new model of affiliation centering on the class divisions among *bedniaks*, *seredniaks*, and *kulaks*. But while it was not uncommon for poor peasants to participate in the land reform as beneficiaries of state policy, their new

¹⁹⁵ Northrop 174-175.

identity as “bedniaks” and their willingness to side with the state in a struggle against their wealthy neighbors remained insecure and provisional, and quickly fell away in favor of other forms of self-identification – as peasants, Muslims, and Uzbeks – in the face of the frighteningly undifferentiated violence of the first months of collectivization. As the situation stabilized, however, and the state once again began to extend protections to bedniaks and privileges to active collaborators, the opportunities offered by class-based identities returned and expanded in the Uzbek countryside. Of course, passing references in state documents to the “enthusiasm” of peasants in greeting collectivization should be treated with caution. Even aside from the eagerness of local officials to highlight any positive response to state policy, there is the anecdotal nature of the sources, the focus on open and often dramatic manifestations of peasant attitudes, which means that passivity, indifference, and milder forms of opposition were almost certainly underrepresented. The upshot is that it is nearly impossible to judge the frequency of collaboration and pro-Soviet “activism” relative to other responses to collectivization among Uzbek peasants. Yet in spite of all this, a few general patterns may be inferred. First, the class principle proposed by the state undermined mass displays of resistance even when it did not win full converts to the Soviet system, and it ultimately encouraged at least some active peasant participation in the campaign for dekulakization. Second, when peasants did assume a more active and participatory role, it did not entail a surrender of all other identities and allegiances, but rather added another layer to the complex and shifting structure of peasant affiliations. Finally, while the space for this new social and political role as a collaborator in the Soviet project had been created by the state, its content was not dictated from above. Rather, it too was the product of an ongoing negotiation governed as much by peasant priorities as by state power.

Even at the height of mass resistance incorporating individuals of all peasant classes, cracks occasionally appeared in the foundations of peasant unity against the state. The

particularly skillful “explanation” of an official could persuade poorer peasants to rethink their decision to affiliate themselves with kulaks. An official in Andijan okrug described how he had peacefully resolved a mass demonstration of 350 peasants: “They fulfilled my demand and sent away from their ranks the *lishentsy*, [so that] only *bedniaks*, *batraks*, and *seredniaks* remained. And after an explanation and unmasking of the *bai* and kulak provocation, they accepted a very good resolution [on the formation of a *kolkhoz*].”¹⁹⁶ By assigning guilt for peasant resistance on a strictly class basis, the state both guaranteed the lower peasant classes some amount of immunity and encouraged them to adopt these class-based identities in self-defense. After hearing a similar class-based explanation, the peasants in a Fergana village “produced a decision to exile the ringleaders of the demonstration.”¹⁹⁷ As the state increasingly succeeded in propagating its own conception of peasant resistance divided by class, *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* responded less and less eagerly to appeals for village solidarity. In Samarkand okrug in late 1931, the attempt to organize a refusal to work among the peasant women in one *kolkhoz* backfired, as the women reported their would-be agitators, whom they specified as “the wives of kulaks,” to the authorities.¹⁹⁸ We can only speculate on how many peasants were in favor of the demonstration, how many simply stood aside, and how many actually participated in reporting the instigators to the police. But peasant attitudes were clearly diverging from the consensus in favor of resistance that had reigned in early 1930.

Beyond the mere refusal to participate in public opposition, some peasants seemed prepared to call a truce with the state altogether in order to pursue a struggle against other peasants. From the beginning of land reform and *dekulakization*, a small but apparently

¹⁹⁶ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 51, 178.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 37, 134.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 175, 500.

committed cohort of peasant “activists” came forward as avowed allies of the Soviet state to participate in the attack on the wealthy and powerful in the Uzbek villages. In the Russian context, Sheila Fitzpatrick describes such individuals as “peasants with a real commitment to the Soviet cause and the kolkhoz” who “tended to be former bedniaks and batraks, often with earlier experience as industrial workers or veterans of the Red Army in the Civil War.”¹⁹⁹ In Uzbekistan, such formative experiences in industry or the military would have been exceedingly rare among peasants, and what exactly drew activists to participate in the Soviet project remains something of a mystery. As early as February of 1930, however, there were hints that active participation might grow into something more than the commitment of a few scattered individuals who had traditionally occupied a place at the bottom of the village social hierarchy. Alongside the anti-collectivization demonstrations, state documents claim, there arose “mass demonstrations of the batraks and bedniaks against the bais, with the seizure of bai property.”²⁰⁰ None of these demonstrations are described in detail, so it is difficult to know what might have triggered them or how they played out. But an OGPU report corroborates the claim, referring to an upsurge in the “spontaneous [*stikhiinyi*] activism of the poor, demanding dekulakization.”²⁰¹ What was not observed at this time, however, was a corresponding mass activism in favor of the kolkhozes. Even while peasants continued to be, at the very least, highly skeptical of collectivization, they might be willing to support a state policy that penalized their wealthier neighbors and confiscated their property, nominally for use by the kolkhoz, but in some cases to be redistributed for personal use among the poorer peasants.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick 119.

²⁰⁰ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 128, 362-363.

²⁰¹ *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t. 3, k. 1, No. 38, 164.

²⁰² See, for example, *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 2, No. 278, 148.

The years 1931 and 1932 saw not only a dramatic decline in mass and open forms of peasant resistance, but also a growing number of peasants who actively participated in dekulakization, whether in response to state pressure, in search of personal gain, or in an attempt to achieve a more than passive place in the new Soviet village order. The accounts of Soviet scholars such as Ibragimova consistently emphasize the activism of the peasant masses against the bais after the decline of mass resistance in spring of 1930.²⁰³ Measures for the confiscation of kulak property, the exile of kulak families, and the rooting out of basmachi cells were routinely described as enjoying “the great support of the bedniaks” and being greeted “with enthusiasm” among the majority of the peasants.²⁰⁴ More than anywhere else, however, the state relied on the active participation of local villagers in carrying out the “exposure” of individuals who had managed to hide their kulak social origin and join the kolkhoz. The Uzbek Sovnarkom in January 1931 issued a resolution calling for “broad village meetings of bedniaks, batraks, kolkhozniks, and activist seredniaks” for the purpose of exposing the remaining kulaks in the republic.²⁰⁵ After some initial reluctance, many peasants consented to the active role in the war against the kulaks implied by such meetings, and some even undertook it with enthusiasm. As the deportations of kulaks accelerated in September 1931, the mood of kolkhozniks and poor peasants was described as “high-spirited,” as “they consider the measures taken for the isolation of the kulaks correct and necessary.”²⁰⁶ There were even claims that state policy had failed to keep pace with the mounting activism of the peasants: “The growth of initiative has been so great that the local party organizations have not always and everywhere managed to be at the head of it... Often the exposure of kulaks occurred on the initiative of, and under pressure from, the

²⁰³ Ibragimova 236.

²⁰⁴ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 93, 271; t. 1, no. 152, 447; t. 1, No. 175, 498.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 149, 442.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 265, 124.

kolkhoz and bedniak-batrak mass.”²⁰⁷ Of course, this reliance on the participation and individual initiative of Uzbek peasants meant that opportunities for the manipulation of Soviet power to serve peasant aims multiplied. Personal grudges, village disputes, and peasant rather than Soviet allegiances could motivate accusations that a family was “kulak,” and such cases were often difficult for state representatives to disentangle.²⁰⁸ This suggests the extent to which, despite the deepening divisions in the village both along class lines and on other grounds, the Soviet state continued to face a problem of “access,” in Gregory Massell’s formulation, to the inner workings of Uzbek village society. Just as resistance did not signal absolute rejection of the Soviet state, collaboration did not indicate absolute assimilation into it. Instead, it was a complex and unstable position subject to constant renegotiation in accordance with state leverage and individual peasant priorities.

Rarely, peasants did decide to assume the elements of an explicitly Soviet identity – whether sincere or feigned – during the period of collectivization and dekulakization. This was expressed, above all, in a decision to join the Communist Party. In September of 1931, one village meeting discussing the lists of kulaks slated for deportation prompted fifteen batraks and kolkhozniks to enter the party.²⁰⁹ At about the same time, and similarly in connection with the deportations, a state official observed “a mass influx into the kolkhoz, and a gravitation of the kolkhoz and batrak-bedniak activists and women into the party.”²¹⁰ On the one hand, these developments can be seen as the fruits of the state’s policies of isolating kulaks while opening its arms to the lower peasant classes and Uzbek women. On the other hand, the explicit connection with the deportations suggests that peasants may have been responding not only to conciliation,

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 251, 18-19.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 208, 606; t. 1, No. 209, 608; t. 2, No. 278, 151.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 265, 123.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, t. 2, No. 257, 18.

but also to a display of power. The spectacle of fellow villagers being rounded up, taken to collection points, and deported probably underscored a sense of the state's permanence, stability, and coercive might in a way that the more arbitrary and sporadic violence of 1930 had not. In an amplified echo of the experiences of land reform, the tightly interlocking nature of state power and the language of class encouraged peasants to attribute primacy to class categories, at least in their presentation of themselves to the state, and increasingly, as a way of framing their relationships with other villagers.

One final example of the way that state-sponsored class identities might gain currency among Uzbek peasants, though in ways that did not always correspond to the state's original intentions, can be found in the split that periodically emerged between *bedniaks* and *seredniaks*. In the experimental months of early 1930, peasants sometimes took the idea of a class basis for *kolkhoz* organization in unanticipated directions. In Samarkand *okrug*, for instance, a local official noted with chagrin, "The *seredniaks* insist on organizing the *kolkhoz* without the *bedniaks*, declaring: 'The *bedniaks* don't have any livestock, [so] they will use our draft animals.'"²¹¹ Near Tashkent, *seredniaks* were repeatedly heard complaining, "I would join the *kolkhoz*, but so many idlers [*lentiai*] are joining it," apparently referring to the less productive *bedniak* farmers.²¹² Even once a *kolkhoz* had been formed, it could be plagued by internal tensions between *bedniak* and *seredniak* *kolkhozniks*, caused, in at least one instance, by disputes over "the distribution of labor."²¹³ Conflicts of this sort indicate that the socioeconomic divisions between "*seredniak*" and "*bedniak*," while solidified and systematized by the Soviet state,

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 28, 96.

²¹² *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 116, 337.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 74, 232.

corresponded to acknowledged disparities in property and productivity among Uzbek peasants and carried connotations that were not always subject to state control.

The advent of collectivization in Uzbekistan deeply altered the structures of power and affiliation in the village, confronting the various imagined communities of peasant resistance with an alternative model of class-based belonging and participation in the Soviet system. Yet even when peasants opted to collaborate, it was far from the case that their identities were dictated by the state, or that collaboration entailed a participation in Soviet power exclusively on the state's terms. The way that peasants self-identified and responded to state power continued to be the product of negotiation, as peasants weighed opportunities, dangers, and personal priorities and accepted social roles that were provisional and multi-layered. Collaboration meant that Uzbek peasants were becoming, to an extent that varied dramatically by individual, Sovietized. But it also meant that the Soviet system in Uzbekistan increasingly took on a shape defined by the initiative of peasant actors and the positions of compromise they found within the malleable and still unresolved village social order under collectivization.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

By the end of 1932, collectivization had taken root in the Uzbek countryside, with the majority of peasants participating in collective agriculture, the wealthier peasant classes decimated, and mass resistance dissipating in favor of provisional acceptance of the new status quo. But while Uzbek peasants were more integrated into the Soviet system than ever before, they continued to use their position within that system to pursue interests that were not always in line with those of the state. The peasants' new role as kolkhozniks did not mean that old forms of ownership had disappeared entirely. Nominally "collectivized" fields might in fact continue to be divided into numerous individual plots, or kolkhoz brigades might consistently be assigned to work in areas corresponding to the lands they had held prior to collectivization. Draft animals might be collectivized "only formally" or not at all, or they might be sold off by kolkhozniks for short-term profit, or simply due to a lack of fodder to feed them.²¹⁴ In addition to the problem of finding native cadres who were "not only politically, but also technically literate" for work in rural Uzbekistan, the central authorities continued to exert only weak ideological and legal control over local officials. As a result, corruption ran rampant in the form of "family connections, mutual protection [*krugovaia poruka*], and degenerating lifestyles."²¹⁵

While Uzbek peasants were at times able to soften the impact of collectivization policies on their daily lives, not all outcomes were subject to their control. Collectivization brought hunger to Uzbekistan, though nothing like the sort of devastating famines that swept through the

²¹⁴ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 84, 248-49; t. 2, No. 278, 148.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 186, 546-552.

Ukraine and Kazakhstan. From the earliest months of 1930, the fear of famine haunted peasant protests against collectivization, and especially against the cotton culture. Peasant demonstrations were accompanied by cries of, “You force us to sow cotton instead of wheat and sorghum, but you don’t give us bread!” and “We will die of hunger.”²¹⁶ When the state failed to provide adequate supplies of bread in Bukhara okrug in March of 1930, there were even reports of a starvation death. A crowd demanding “the repeal of collectivization and the regulation of the supply of bread” surrounded the local RIK building and deposited at its door the corpse of an Uzbek woman, claiming that she had died of hunger.²¹⁷ By April of 1932, hunger had developed into a serious issue. In Nur-Atin raion, the kolkhozes were seized by real shortages of grain: “For food they are using bread with millet and ground roots. The kolkhozniks are selling or trading their household articles for bread. For this reason, sixty families have left from several sel’sovets. The remaining kolkhozniks also have the intention to leave with the arrival of warm weather.” Several other raions saw a similar resurgence of outmigration in the winter and spring of 1932, suggesting that they too experienced severe hardship during these months.²¹⁸

In the USSR as a whole, one important outcome of collectivization that was inextricably connected to the hunger and repression experienced in the village was a mass migration into the cities. As Sheila Fitzpatrick observes, the vast exodus of peasants from the countryside could be induced by “fear of being dekulakized or hatred of the kolkhoz,” or alternatively by the allure of the “new employment opportunities” in the cities that the growth of industry in the early 1930s had created.²¹⁹ The data from the 1926 and 1939 Soviet censuses illustrate this disparity, as the urban population grew from 17.9% of the total population of the USSR before collectivization to

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 51, 185; *Sovetskaia derevnia*, t.3, k. 1, No. 161, 483.

²¹⁷ *Tragediia sredneaziatskogo kishlaka*, t. 1, No. 38, 139.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, t. 1, No. 97, 281-282.

²¹⁹ Fitzpatrick 80.

32.8% afterward (see Table 2). Uzbekistan, however, presents an interesting exception to this general trend, with virtually no change in the urban to rural ratio between 1926 and 1939. It is not entirely obvious why this is the case. It is possible that the option of migration to the cities simply was not as available or as appealing for Uzbek peasants as it was for those elsewhere in the Soviet Union. For example, the great growth of industry that drew peasants to urban centers in Russia was probably much more limited in Uzbekistan. However, even the other republics of Central Asia, comparable to Uzbekistan in terms of culture and often even less industrialized, displayed a significant shift away from the countryside and into the cities. The uniqueness of Uzbekistan in this respect thus remains puzzling, and a closer demographic analysis may be necessary to discern the processes at work. But it is suggestive, at least, that while peasants in Russia, the Ukraine, and Kazakhstan “voted with their feet” by leaving the collectivized countryside in record numbers, the peasants in Uzbekistan, where both hunger and repression were comparatively mild, did not display the same long-term, massive impulse to outmigration. As a non-nomadic, non-grain-growing region of the USSR, Uzbekistan experienced the coercive power of Stalinist collectivization only in a restrained and diluted form, and it was a form that peasants may ultimately have been willing to endure.

Studies of the history of Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s have tended to underscore the fundamental weakness of state power in the region, with its reliance on unreliable local intermediaries and its ambitious transformative projects confronted by long-standing cultural and ideological alternatives to Soviet rule. Douglas Northrop finds the unveiling campaign to have been a failure through the end of the 1930s, as Islam, traditional family structures, and new Uzbek markers of identity prevailed over a concerted and prolonged Soviet campaign for women’s “emancipation” in Central Asia. Shoshana Keller similarly emphasizes that despite the destruction of the public, institutional structures of Islam, private Islamic belief

and practice continued unabated in its unofficial and underground forms. Adrienne Edgar points to the continuing currency of pre-Soviet tribal identities in Turkmenistan in the face of Soviet attempts to redirect loyalties toward the new Turkmen nationality. Without ignoring the changes brought on by Soviet rule, these scholars paint a picture of Stalin-era Central Asia as one still dominated by non-Soviet social structures and mentalities, in which state projects appear from the outside as an assault on traditional ways of life. The experience of collectivization in Uzbekistan does not contradict this general picture. The Soviet state's penetration into the Uzbek countryside remained both during and after collectivization spotty and sporadic, mediated by local officials whose understanding of and sympathy with the Communist Party program was often limited at best. The Uzbek peasant population had little enthusiasm for collectivization, and instead had recourse to a set of non-Soviet worldviews for defining their own priorities and social identities in opposition to the Soviet system.

Table 2. Shift in urban and rural populations of Central Asian republics and the USSR as a whole from the 1926 census to the 1939 census. Source: M.N. Guboglo et al., eds., *Perepis' 1939 goda: dokumental'nye istochniki Tsentral'nogo Gosudarstvennogo Arkhiva Narodnogo Khoziaistva* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i etnicheskoi antropologii AN SSSR, 1990), ch. 4-5, 821-876.

Area	1926 Census		1939 Census	
	Urban %	Rural %	Urban %	Rural %
Uzbek SSR	22.2	77.8	23.0	77.0
Turkmen SSR	13.7	86.3	33.2	66.8
Tajik SSR	10.3	89.7	17.0	83.0
Kazakh SSR	8.5	91.5	27.8	72.2
Kirghiz SSR	12.2	87.8	18.5	81.5
USSR	17.9	82.1	32.8	67.2

What is surprising, however, is the fact that in the case of collectivization, this confrontation between a weak but ideologically driven state and an Uzbek society resistant to transformation led not to a protracted and hostile impasse, but rather to new possibilities for integration. In part, this was the result of a fundamentally different state approach to collectivization in Uzbekistan. Unlike the previous transformational policies of the 1920s, collectivization was undertaken at an all-union level after a decision-making process in which Uzbekistan figured little if at all. When collectivization was met by a surge of mass resistance in the Uzbek countryside, Moscow strategists prioritized caution over revolutionary transformation and enforced a retreat to gradualism. Yet state policy only set the limits of what was possible and what was advantageous within the framework of the Soviet system; without a comparable impulse toward negotiation and compromise from Uzbek peasants, collectivization might have remained in a deadlock. The weakness of the Soviet state, in the context of the secondary importance of rapid results for collectivization in Uzbekistan and the active attempts to court poor peasants, meant that the opportunities for peaceful coexistence, partial participation, and personal advancement within the Soviet system often outweighed the incentives to reject that system in its entirety. Many Uzbek peasants responded cautiously but readily to the new spaces for compromise left by the gaps in Stalinist state control, and set to work testing the limits of a livable arrangement within the framework of a collectivized Soviet Uzbek village.

The essential question, then, is to what extent Uzbek peasants became integrated into the Soviet system, or “Sovietized” in any other sense, as a result of collectivization. This is a topic that calls for further research. To what extent did new collaborationist identities take root among Uzbek peasants, and how did the situation change in the Uzbek village after 1932? How were Uzbek attitudes toward the state and toward concepts of class shaped by the longer-term experiences of collectivization? Douglas Northrop argues that the outcome of the unveiling

campaign at the end of the 1930s was, if anything, the promulgation of a “traditionalist” Uzbek identity that, although profoundly shaped by the experience of Soviet rule, was defined in opposition to that rule and hindered rather than facilitated integration into the Soviet system. He postulates that true Sovietization did not occur in Uzbekistan until the years of the Second World War.²²⁰ The story of collectivization in Uzbekistan lends itself to a slightly different interpretation, suggesting a more complex and multifaceted process of Sovietization that had already begun by the early 1930s. In a purely mechanical sense, Uzbek peasants were Sovietized by collectivization to a greater extent than they had been previously by virtue of their integration into the kolkhozes, which were conduits of both state ideology and state administration. More importantly, though, this integration had come about, first, as a result of the peasants’ own search for a legitimate place within the Soviet system, and second, after the state had successfully chipped away at village solidarity and offered in its place class-based identities that offered poor peasants a privileged position within the new village order. By 1932, even as popular resistance to unveiling remained rigid and steeped in a traditionalist ideology, most peasants had accepted some form of membership, however limited and uncertain, in the Soviet system, and some had even become its active proponents. Instead of viewing Sovietization as a single discrete attribute, or even as a position along a one-dimensional continuum, the variety of peasant responses to collectivization demands an appreciation of the ways that identities and beliefs were situational and in flux, defined by individual core values but receptive to new opportunities, pursuing integration while staving off total assimilation.

²²⁰ Northrop 348-350.

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