

WRITING THE HISTORY OF COLLECTIVIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN: ORAL NARRATIVES

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Executive Summary

How do rural Uzbeks who directly experienced Stalinist collectivization judge the process today in light of their memories, and what conclusions may we draw as scholars who compare a variety of texts with oral narration? Collectivization studies form a substantial body of literature within postwar Sovietology. However, collectivization in post-Soviet Central Asia has not been scrutinized to the degree found in Russia and Ukraine. This study is the first oral history project that engages actual witnesses to and participants in collectivization in Uzbekistan; this oral history research, combined with research in archives and scholarly studies published in Uzbekistan, provides the basis for the first extensive Western scholarly account of collectivization in Central Asia. It expands understanding of a particular program of forced modernization, and the gaps between structural and socio-cultural change. In a period when policy makers recommend changes to independent Uzbekistan's land laws, this study may provide a deeper sense of cultural attitudes about land and livelihood in rural Uzbekistan, with implications for changes in land tenure systems.

How do rural Uzbeks who directly experienced Stalinist collectivization judge the process today in light of their memories, and what conclusions may we draw as scholars who compare a variety of texts with oral narration? Collectivization studies form a substantial body of literature within postwar Sovietology. However, collectivization in post-Soviet Central Asia has not been scrutinized to the degree found in Russia and Ukraine. This study is the first oral history project that engages actual witnesses to and participants in collectivization in Uzbekistan; this oral history research, combined with research in archives and scholarly studies published in Uzbekistan, provides the basis for the first extensive Western scholarly account of collectivization in Central Asia.

How were Soviet plans for land reform and collectivization, based as they were on assumptions about land-holding that reflected Russia's dominant communal forms, changed when applied in Uzbekistan, where private smallholding was the norm? How did the small farmers—the *dehqons*—and the semi-nomadic herders respond to state strategies for collectivization?¹ Dehqon responses and reactions to land reform and collectivization cannot be understood apart from a study of the state's project, but the primary goal of this research is to

¹ There was great variety to landholding in the territory that became Uzbekistan, but for this paper, the term *dehqon* will primarily mean a farmer who owns a small amount of land. Russian language sources and histories of collectivization in Uzbekistan often use *krest'ian* and sometimes a Russified form of *dehqon*, *dekhkan* (and *dekhkanstvo*), but the term and the differences between an Uzbek *dehqon* and a Russian *krest'ian* are never explained, and consequently, the reader makes assumptions that the Uzbek *dehqon*'s relationship to the means of production were the same as for the Russian *krest'ian*. The critical difference is that the Uzbek *dehqon* owned his (and in some cases her) land, while the typical Russian *krest'ian*, after the 1861 emancipation, was an owner only in that he belonged to an *obshchina*, a collective ownership structure; at the time of the Revolution, most Russian peasants were not individual owners of specific pieces of land. Uzbek *dehqons*, especially in the parts of Uzbekistan that had been part of Russian Turkestan, were individual owners, and thus we translate the term here as 'farmer', in order to distinguish a person who owns and works on land, from a person who works on land that he does not own, a peasant.

understand how the *dehqon* and the herder responded to, reacted to, and coped with collectivization's transformation of agriculture, herding, social structures, and life. While published works in Russian, discussed below, establish a strong base for examining the processes of collectivization, finding the experience of the ordinary Uzbek *dehqon* is more challenging. Combining archival sources with oral histories offers a means to go beyond the voices that formed official records and to elicit the unique and locally-defined experience of those who carried out collectivization and those who were forced into collectives.

This paper, a product of our oral history research on collectivization in Uzbekistan, carried out from 2001 to 2004, addresses one major theme that helps establish the framework for examining *dehqon* stories about collectivization. The elderly collective farmers whom we interviewed identified themselves and explained their situation prior to collectivization using language that scholars associate with Marxist-Leninist class categories: when discussing the years before the equalizing process of joining the collective farm, they referred to their families as "poor," "middle," or "rich" *dehqons*. Was this their self-understanding at the time of collectivization, or is it a product of the social forms that collectivization created?

This question cannot be answered by oral history interviews alone. Even if the categories appear in the stories of all of Uzbekistan's elderly collective farmers today, we could not infer from this alone that they understood themselves in these terms in the 1920s. To make a strong case requires correlation with *dehqon* self-descriptions from the pre-revolution years. This paper begins evaluating *dehqon* representations of social class at the time of collectivization through

examination of common threads that appear through transcripts of interviews with elderly dehqons in Uzbekistan, focusing on descriptions of class and of property ownership.²

Prior Work in this Area

Anthropologists' interest in non-literate history or recollection, concerned with questions of genealogical past, ethnic origins, or shattering events, figures prominently in ethnographies (Evans-Pritchard 1969 [1940], Levi-Strauss 1969, Rosaldo 1980, Price 1983, Goody 1987). Oral historians and anthropologists puzzle over the reliability of memory as opposed to the professional scholarship of written texts or archival materials (Grele 1975, Lummis 1983).

Cultural studies advocates a combination of social scientific and literary approaches toward the explanation and analysis of remembered events. Oral accounts can be reread by construing past understandings with a sense of how the actors themselves (our interviewees) impart cultural meanings to their collectivization experiences (Foucault 1972, Geertz 1973, de Certeau 1984).

Western scholarship about Soviet collectivization has proved enormously informative about the toll in human lives born of the massive socio-economic upheaval of collectivization (Lewin 1975, Conquest 1986, Tauger 1991). Scholars dedicated to understanding the "hows" and "whys" of collectivization have argued over the necessity of collectivization (Millar and Nove 1976, Hunter and Viola 1988). Since the 1980s, social historical accounts of the subaltern within Soviet society have explained how collectivization was experienced by direct participants and/or victims of the process (Viola 1987, Fitzpatrick 1994). One may regard the aforementioned works

² Russell Zanca and Marianne Kamp began joint oral history research on collectivization in Namangan province of Uzbekistan in 2001, funded in part by a grant to Kamp from Whitman College. Zanca continued the project, working with researchers from the Young Scholars Society (Yosh Olimlar Jamiyati) of Tashkent, in Navoiy province in 2002, funded by a grant from Northeastern Illinois University. Kamp and Zanca teamed with Elyor Karimov, the director of Yosh Olimlar, to carry out the NCEEER-funded collaborative project, "Collectivization in Uzbekistan: Oral Histories," in 2003; researchers from Yosh Olimlar extended the oral history interviews to Farg'ona Province, Tashkent Province, Xorazm Province, Buxoro Province, and Qashqa Daryo Province. Work on transcribing interviews continued into 2004. Kamp, Zanca and Karimov are now evaluating 120 interviews with elderly collective farmers.

of social history as a point of departure for our study of collectivization in Central Asia. Both the Western researchers and the archives they base their work on tend to focus on problems in collectivization. This provides a body of work that reveals collectivization's hardships, but does remarkably little to explain why or how peasants supported collectivization or benefited from it.

Scholars from Uzbekistan have written accounts of collectivization that form a strong foundation for this oral history project. R. Kh. Aminova's works include examinations of every phase of land reform in Uzbekistan from the first years of NEP through the 1930s. Solidly based on archival research, contemporary publications and published collections of Party documents, Aminova's volumes contain not only a thorough outline of collectivization, but also examination of land reform (Aminova 1969, 1977). Opposite the Western historians, Soviet historians tended to assume that most peasants supported collectivization, and to regard problems as important, but as anomalous and not as the primary focus for attention. Writing in the 1960s to 1980s, Aminova discussed "excesses" and "mistakes" in collectivization that caused the peasants to dislike Soviet power. During *glasnost'*, Aminova laid out a fuller critique of collectivization (Aminova 1989). In post-independence Uzbekistan, historians have reconsidered collectivization, including the famine in 1933. A. Golovanov's *Peasantry of Uzbekistan* argued that although other alternatives were possible, the Soviet government chose a destructive and coercive approach to agrarian transformation (Golovanov, 1992). Abdumalik Rizzaqov's *O'zbekistonda Paxtachilik Tarixi (A History of the Cotton Industry in Uzbekistan)* examined the relationship between collectivization, the USSR's goal of cotton independence, and the creation of a cotton monoculture in Uzbekistan (Rizzaqov 1994). Farida Niazova's articles explore collectivization's consequences in human deaths by starvation, and uprisings against

collectivization (Niazova 1998a, 1998b). Newspapers in Uzbekistan have presented memoirs of the collectivization period, and one collection of the memoirs of collective farmers has been published (Huvaitov). Such publications are valuable to this project, but are not the result of a systematic study using the methods of oral history.

The work that perhaps comes closest to our project is Rustambek Shamsutdinov's study of dekulakized farmers from the Fargana valley, which he based on archival documents, letters, and interviews with the families of exiled Uzbeks who returned home (Shamsutdinov 2001). However, our project hears not from the minority, those who were exiled as obstacles to collectivization, but from the majority, those who participated in collectivization and built the collective farms of Uzbekistan, willingly or unwillingly, in the 1930s.

Our oral history research, which produced 120 transcripts of interviews with elderly collective farmers born between 1900 and 1925, in seven regions of Uzbekistan, was designed toward investigating these themes: First, did collectivization affect social identity, by creating socio-economic classes and ethnic differences where none may have existed? In other words, is it possible to see the "civilizing mission" of collectivization as imposing cultural divisions among peoples that continue today? Second, resistance is the subject of many historical studies of peasantries (Scott 1985, Kearney 1996, Viola 1996). We know of armed uprisings, sabotage, stealing, shirking, etc., but what do we know of how people decided to defy the authorities? What were the "imported" policies and common understandings of collectivization that caused people to oppose the new order? Third, what of those people who supported the Red juggernaut, the new ideology, the unheard of nationalism? Who supported collectivization and why? What did farmers or shepherds think it offered? If there were famines, shortages, arrests, violent

punishments, and general poverty, as people had never before experienced, then why did many enthusiastically endorse the new order?

The Significance of this Project

Oral history, in particular as theorized by feminist scholars, seeks to bring silenced voices into the historical record (Sangster, 1994; Reinhartz, 1992). Our interviewees included many who were Party members and leaders in collective farms, and also many who were ordinary collective farmers. While hero-workers and Party members often presented normative life stories to the Soviet press, those whose lives did not represent the victory of socialism did not become part of the historical record. The analysis of collectivization that results from a combined oral history and archival study provides a deeper understanding of collectivization outside Russia, in an area that shared none of Russia's preconditions. More broadly, our study expands understanding of a particular program of forced modernization, and the gaps between structural and socio-cultural change. In a period when policy makers recommend changes to independent Uzbekistan's land laws, this study may provide a deeper sense of cultural attitudes about land and livelihood in rural Uzbekistan, with implications for changes in land tenure systems.

Class Identity in Rural Uzbekistan

When we initiated this project, we wanted to investigate, among other things, how collectivization affected social identity. Did it create socio-economic classes where none may have existed? In other words, is it possible to see the "civilizing mission" of collectivization as imposing cultural divisions among peoples that continue today?

This paper examines the ways that Uzbek collective farmers talked about class and dekulakization seventy years after the beginning of collectivization. Clearly, in these interviews, the paradigm of class that the state and the Communist Party used to divide the countryside during collectivization—by enhancing differences between the rich and the poor *dehqon*—continued to shape the ways that these farmers represented themselves and understood collectivization. Was this because the state imposed its categories, in its effort to spark class warfare by dividing the “kulak” from the “*bedniak*”? Was it also, perhaps, because the categories that the Party emphasized in the land reform and collectivization campaigns corresponded to ways that Uzbek *dehqons* understood their own situations? Scholars who have examined the Soviet project in Central Asia have argued that Russian Party members there wore “Bolshevik blinders,” and were only able to see and understand Uzbekistan through serious distortions. But this research suggests instead that the Party was very effective at exploiting differences among Uzbek *dehqons*, in particular by speaking to the very real resentment that landless sharecroppers (*chorikors*) felt toward those who employed them.³

Oral history can have many possible emphases and goals, but we might distinguish two major kinds of research—that which seeks to explain some significant social change or movement and its construction in social memory by interviewing a large number of participants, and that which explores subjectivity and is more concerned with the ways one subject tells his or her story than with some aggregate of results. Our interviews were designed to elicit common narratives and regional distinctions. All interviewees were asked about their parents’ way of making a living, and when the interviewee responded that his or her father was a *dehqon*, follow-

³ *Chorikor* is a Persian term meaning “quarter-work.” In agricultural Central Asia, a *chorikor* was a rural laborer who owned no land, and so hired himself out to a rich *dehqon* for a one or two year contract, under which he was supposed to be able to keep one fourth of the crop from the field that he worked; the term translates most closely as sharecropper.

up questions concerned what land and other resources they owned, in what form, what crops they raised, and so on. Almost invariably, respondents immediately introduced descriptors of their class status when they mentioned their parents' profession and land. In a section of questions on the first steps in collectivization, interviewees were asked about the responses of various groups in their community to collectivization: who joined voluntarily, and who resisted? These sections from the longer interviews provide the data for this analysis.

Mass agricultural collectivization in Uzbekistan began in select regions at the same time as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, that is, in November of 1929.⁴ However, the base for collectivization differed markedly from the dominant Soviet regions. In Uzbekistan, the Party was quite weak in most rural communities, and the communities themselves were made up of individual proprietors who had never been associated with any communal form of agriculture. The Party began its efforts to attract support from the rural poor farmers and landless laborers during the 1920s, when it organized the Union of Ploughmen (Qo'shchi) and later the Union of the Poor (Kambag'allar Ittifoqi), both of which established modes of collective work and ownership; the membership of these organizations was almost entirely native Central Asian. The Party also organized Rabzemles, the Land and Forest Workers, which was much smaller and almost exclusively attracted Russians and other immigrants. During the land reform, while most large landholdings were redistributed to farmers who already had several hectares, in some cases, these local unions of landless farm laborers formed artels which were given undeveloped (i.e.,

⁴ Ronald Suny writes, in error, that Central Asia was excepted from the November 1929 directive on mass collectivization. Rather, the 1929 directive called for mass collectivization in Central Asian regions where land reform had already taken place. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the successor States*. Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 223.

non-irrigated) land to develop and farm collectively, and a few hundred collective farms were established.⁵

In Uzbekistan, the Party prioritized collectivizing regions that produced cotton, and thus the first wave of collectivization focused on some 20 to 30 regions in Fargana, Tashkent and Samarkand oblasts. However, even within those oblasts, regions where the basmachi movement was reputedly strong, and regions raising mainly grain and livestock were not subject to the first wave of collective farm formation in 1929 and 1930. Soviet economic plans for Uzbekistan, from the early years of the Union, emphasized the expansion of cotton cropping at the expense of other crops. Between 1925 and 1928, cotton production expanded through incentives to farmers. There was an aggressive loan program, giving very low interest loans to farmers who signed contracts for delivery of cotton to state-operated cotton “points,” and there was a program for giving state funds to landless farm workers to form work collectives and open new land to cultivation, if they grew cotton. By 1929, when collectivization began, the state controlled the financing of planting and purchasing almost all cotton in Uzbekistan. This contrasted with other crops, where the state had less interest and did not make aggressive loans. When the order to collectivize came, the plans for Uzbekistan focused on cotton-producing regions, and used the farmers’ dependence on state loans and contracts to pressure many to form collective farms through threats to withhold loans.

Uzbekistan began its collectivization campaign in regions that had already experienced land reform. Land reform began in 1925 and ran right into collectivization, so that some interview subjects talked about them separately, but many regarded the two as the same thing. In particular, de-kulakization began with land reform, and continued in the early collectivizing

⁵ RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 1266, p. 87, February 1928, there were 410 collective farms in Uzbekistan.

years. In the land reform, those with large holdings were forced to give up land above a norm, land that was then redistributed. In theory it went to landless peasants, but more often it was distributed to those who already had a small amount of land. In the land reform of the 1920s, those redistributed lands usually became the private holdings of individual farmers. The kulaks who had owned the lands—actually, Uzbeks usually used the term *boi* (or rich man) for large land owner—were sometimes allowed to continued living and working on their remaining land, but sometimes were arrested and exiled. In the early collectivizing period, this dispossession of kulaks continued, but now their lands were no longer redistributed; instead they were turned over to newly formed collective farms.

Ultimately, although collectivizing cotton-growing regions was the state’s highest priority, the plans for collectivization eventually extended to all agricultural and herding land in Uzbekistan. Grain growing regions, herding regions, and finally orchards and vineyards all came under the collective system by the late 1930s. Among our oral history respondents from Namangan and Tashkent regions, those who lived in cotton-dominated lands remembered forming collectives in the winter of 1930, at the height of the “mass collectivization” campaign, while one whose father made a living as an orchardist recalled that his family’s land was collectivized in 1935 or 1936.

Class Identity in Oral Histories of Collectivization

In this paper, we will focus on the ways that several interviewees used the language of class when they talked about the period of land reform and collectivization. Their stories illustrate the endurance and the elision of class identities. It has been argued that class identities

in rural areas were weak, and the Soviet state tried to light the fires of class conflict in the countryside in the late 1920s in order to more clearly differentiate between agriculturalists who would support and oppose Soviet order. Whether or not Uzbek farmers clearly identified themselves as rich (*boi*), middle (*o'rtta xol*), or poor (*kambag'al*) prior to the land reform, these terms came into common parlance, and became tangibly meaningful, during the land reform. Our oral history interviewees used the language of class division spontaneously and with the assumption that we all understood what was meant by each of the categories. At the same time, a number of interviewees identified their families as poor (*kambag'al*), while further discussion brought out their ownership of rather significant resources before collectivization.⁶

All of our interview subjects divided rural people into the rich and the poor, and all recalled that the state made these divisions. In some cases, they accepted and even strongly asserted these state-based designations for their own families' conditions, but in other cases, our respondents presented several conflicting images of their class positions at the time of Mass Collectivization. Ulug'xo'jaev, born in 1913 in a mountainous, grain-growing part of Tashkent region, responded to a question about his father's occupation thus: "I was born in a totally impoverished (*g'irt kambag'al*) farming family. [My father] did not have livestock or this and that, he worked in the service of others, he worked as a servant at the doors of rich men."

⁶ We have selected interviews with subjects who spoke with confidence about the past. The spectrum of human memory among people who are over 80 years of age is rather wide, with some respondents recalling names, dates and events clearly, while others often cannot remember details of their own lives. Just as important to memory of the collectivization period, however, seems to have been the position and family connections of the interview subject in the years following the collectivization campaigns. Those whose fathers were activists, and those who themselves entered collective farm leadership probably had many occasions to revisit the past, and to actively recollect, and also reconstruct what went on in collectivization. What does this mean for the purity of memory? We make no claims that Soviet lives are unmediated narratives of a pure past; quite the contrary—we are interested in the ways that narratives promoted by the state become frameworks for subjects in telling their own lives (Kamp, 2001). In this sense, reliance on class categories in describing the past reflects language that was used throughout the Soviet period.

Ulug'xo'jaev explained that his father was a charikor, a farm laborer hired for a one-year or two-year contract, and that he himself had worked as a charikor from childhood until collectivization. However, after collectivization, he said, his family became "middle" farmers (o'rta hol). "We had a yoke of oxen, and a horse..."

Melibaev, born in 1910 in a cotton growing area of Namangan region, was orphaned when he was a child, and lived with his grandmother. His father had been a farmer and a butcher, and he described him as "poor" (kambag'al). He owned 3 tanobs of land.⁷ He said that he depended on his grandmother for 2 years, and then at age 10 or twelve, "I went around to the doors of the rich, herded cattle, sought the mercies of the rich." When he was orphaned, his father left a little property, but "my guardians sold it all to perform the funeral rites. . ."

Melibaev's identity as a poor farmer was reinforced when he was a teenager. He joined the poor peasant's union that formed an artel. The artel, he said, "only accepted the poor, it did not accept the rich. . . they told the poor to enter the artel. They took the poor, and I too entered, when I was 15." The artel, in his recollection, was the beginning of collectivization. The poor "took land from the rich, seized it with their hands and formed the artel."

Unlike Melibaev and Ulug'xo'jaev, Holmetov, from Bustonlik region (which was part of Kazakstan from 1929 to the 1950s), was hesitant to assert a class identity. He said, "My father was a farmer," but unlike other respondents, did not include the word "rich" or "poor." After the revolution the Soviet government

⁷ Tanob, the traditional measurement for agricultural land in Central Asia, varies in size from .15 to .5 hectares. In the Fargana valley the tanob was smaller than elsewhere. Melibaev's father had between .5 and 1.5 hectares.

seized all the land, did not give land to anyone. . . to people who did not have an orchard and before had nothing to do, it gave 25 sathi⁸ of land, but did not give any more than that. And then the kolkhoz began, from the 1930s it began. At first the condition was voluntary—whoever wants to enter, let them enter, and nobody had hesitations then, but later it was made almost a matter of force. They took all of people’s excess livestock, arrested and killed some of the rich . . ., and doing this, they used force, they made everyone enter the kolkhoz to work. After that, after the beginning of the kolkhozes, later on the kolkhoz wasn’t bad, it became good.

His family had an orchard, 20 to 30 hectares, and they hired laborers. They owned a pair of oxen and an oil press. In the land reform, there were meetings at the local mosque, where seized land was redistributed. His father’s land was taken, and they were left with an orchard plus a small plot. Although Holmetov was from the sort of family that would have been designated “kulak” in most regions, they apparently were not dekulakized, just dispossessed. Throughout the interview, Holmetov turned questions directly probing his own family’s status toward generalities, and he apparently did not want to label his family rich, though for their region, clearly, they were. When asked whether people opposed the redistribution, he answered, “Most people could not demonstrate opposition together, and demonstrating opposition individually would do no good, so everyone stayed quiet.”

Iliyaminov, b. 1916 in a cotton-growing region of Namangan, asserted just as strongly as Melibaev and Ulug’xo’jaev that his family was poor, but then modified that description. He described his father as a farmer, at first without any class qualifier. “He was an individual farmer. . . He had three hectares. . . At that time we had no horse or cart. We would lift and carry (our produce). . .”

Iliyaminov and his father joined the kolkhoz when it was formed, in 1930.

⁸ A *sath* is another commonly used measurement term from this period, meaning a one-hundredth. However, the relationship between a sath and a tanob is still unclear to me; a sath was either a tenth or a one hundredth fraction of a tanob.

. . . When the kolkhoz was founded they said, if you have a horse, join with your horse. . . Before that there was already dekulakization... This was after the time when we started working, the dividing out of the rich. During the time of individual farming, the state was built, and after it was established, then the state called out the poor people... [We were] poor. . . The poor did not have livestock, and some had land while others did not. . . Our family had some land. We had everything. It would be wrong to say otherwise. And besides, we even had one cow. . . And then when the kolkhoz was formed, we kept our cow for milking, but if we had an ox, it was given to the kolkhoz.

In this description, Iliyaminov wavered in his portrait of his family. He asserted that they were poor, but in the Fargana Valley, three hectares exceeded the norm for land ownership in many districts. Iliyaminov stressed his family's lack of draft animals, and their need to carry cotton on their shoulders in order to take it to the cotton-point. Lack of livestock was one determinant of social class; and yet Iliyaminov noted that the family did own a cow. Iliyaminov's identification of his family with the poor seems political, rather than founded on ownership of the means of production. He stressed that only the poor were allowed to join the kolkhoz at the first formation, while the rich were forbidden. Thus, because his family was allowed to join, they must have been identified as poor, despite owning more land than many self-identified "middle" farmers.

Polvonboev, who was born in the 1910s in Andijon region, also tried out conflicting versions of class identity.⁹ "We were middle farmers, but during Stalin's time there was an order. We were called kulaks, and we were exiled. We were dekulakized. He cut us off for 20 years, Comrade Stalin. We were cut off and on May 24, 1932 we were brought here, to Dalvarz (the name of a collective farm in Bekobod region). . ." Polvonboev first identified his family as

⁹ In his oral history, Polvonboev was asked twice when he was born. He first answered 1909, and then 1916. However, his family said he was in his nineties, so the earlier date may be more accurate. It is not rare in interviewing the elderly in Uzbekistan to learn that they do not know their birth year according to the Western calendar. If the interviewer is paying attention and asks the appropriate follow-up question, the respondent often knows his or her year of birth according to the Central Asian 12-year animal cycle.

“middle farmers,” but later asserted again and again that he was the son of a rich man. “My father was a man with land and water. The land from which we were exiled had gone through land reform one year earlier, and all of the lands were given to people, free, via signatures . . . We gave it to the charikors, and to our relatives. . . We had ten hectares. . .it was divided directly among the poor, for free. Otherwise we would have been exiled to Ukraine. . .”

Apparently after this land division, but before his family was dekulakized, Polvonboev was given the opportunity to join the kolkhoz in the Andijon region where they lived.

A daily payment was given to whoever worked. The lazy ones, the lazy ones like us earned less, and those who hoed with their ketmons earned more. . . I didn’t go [to work] much there. At that time our father was rich and we were under his protection, and so we passed the days relaxing, riding around on horses, playing uloq. They called us polvon (wrestler/hero).

Throughout his interview, Polvonboev repeatedly referred to his family’s status as rich, and also to their dekulakization. Why did he initially assert that his father was a “middle” farmer?

While kulak was an ascribed status, Polvonbaev’s own ways of identifying his family included both rich and “middle” farmer. We do not know how he portrayed his background in the Soviet period, although because he was dekulakized, and lived on a kolkhoz that was famous as an exemplary farming place, but also as the home of kulaks, he would have had difficulty asserting less than at least a “middle” status. In this post-Soviet narrative, where Uzbek discussions of wealth included both condemnations of speculation and platitudes that those who work hard will become rich, Polvonboev’s own story shifted from downplaying his family’s wealth to declaring it proudly.

While asking questions about the details of the first formation of the collective farm, we also raised class-based attitudes about joining the kolkhoz. For example, one interviewer asked,

“Who entered the kolkhoz first—the poor, or others as well?” Melibaev answered, “Poor people like us entered. They did not take the rich then. The rich were not admitted to the kolkhoz. . .”

When we asked how people felt about collectivization at the time, he answered:

The rich were the owners of most of the land. When during collectivization we said we would take their land the rich were of course, what (discontented) and the poor loved it, saying they gave us a little land, finally. Even the poorest got land. . . The rich were upset. The rich, whoever was a mulla, an old mulla, or whoever was rich was sent off to Siberia. . . I was happy. Because I was poor, and they were giving rich men’s land to the poor, I was happy. The government also gave me help to study. They taught me. I entered the artel and worked. Of course I was happy at that time. If there hadn’t been this government, I would have gone on seeking at the doors of the rich. . . And because of this the rich rose up against the government, the bosmachis and kurboshis came and went. All of those kurboshis were from the rich. . . And then the government destroyed them all.

Iliyaminov remembered that the government sent agents who explicitly divided people in his village.

This one was a rich man, this one was middling--they divided that way, and took the poorest, and gathered them. . . . They called them in one evening and had a meeting. Who worked in whose doors?. . . They told us to check up on people. You should divide the rich and the poor, the farm laborer, and gather them, and get them together for a meeting and at the meeting, [tell] that this person worked at that rich man’s [house] and which rich man’s place one worked. . . In our village, the *rais* put this conversation in a healthier way for the poor. He gathered the poor, as I said, and asked, in whose doors did you work? How many years did you work? Sign your name here, to dekulakize them. And here their name was written, I worked there for 5 years, for one year, for 6 years. After writing this, I was at this meeting. . . They said, now tell us, did I work for this person for so many years, or how much did I earn, and did they pay, you must tell us, and thus we will make this person a kulak. So after noting them as kulaks, then we will send them into exile, or we will seize the livestock from their home, we will take their produce, and we will give it to you. So they held this meeting. . . carried out their demands. . . They confiscated everything.

Many of the other “poor” farmers who were interviewed had also personally participated in dekulakization. Azimov, born in 1907 near Shahrissabz, Qashqadaryo, was orphaned and went to

work as a laborer for relatives and rich men. In 1927 he served on the land commission that took away the lands of some of the men he worked for, and he and other laborers received land.

Violence broke out, when those who were granted land, including Azimov, diverted water from rich men's fields to their own, and in retaliation, "basmachis" set fire to Azimov's house, and killed several land commission members. But the basmachis were arrested, and Azimov wound up with land that he farmed individually until collectivization began. Another interviewee, Shomurodov, b. 1907 near Shahrizabz, came from a herding family. His father joined the bamachis in 1922, and was captured and executed that year. This left Shomurodov in poverty, and he went to work "in the doors of the rich" as a hired laborer. When land reform began, his wealthy employer was dispossessed entirely, and the land was given to a group of men, a shirkat, to farm cooperatively. Shomurodov became head of the shirkat. None of these men showed any regret at all about dispossessing their wealthy neighbors, and all benefited directly by taking land from the rich.

In contrast to stories told by these poor farmers and farm workers, Holmetov and Polvonboev, who came from wealthier families, saw collectivization as a force that swept away their property, but they did not choose to remember or recognize the activism of the poor against the rich in the process of collectivization. Holmetov said:

And then the kolkhoz began, from the 1930s it began. At first the condition was voluntary—whoever wants to enter, let them enter, and nobody had hesitations then, but later it was made almost a matter of force. They took all of people's excess livestock, arrested and killed some of the rich, made the rich kulaks, and doing this, they used force, they made everyone enter the kolkhoz to work. After that, after the beginning of the kolkhozes, later on the kolkhoz wasn't bad, it became good.

Polvonboev did not portray the poor seizing the land of the rich. Rather, the land "was seized:"

When the rich did not give it of their own free will, it was seized from the rich and given to the poor. . . Agitation was done for the kolkhoz. When doing agitation they would say, it will be like this, and like that, and they would give explanations. After they explained, gradually, they told people, if you have livestock, bring it . . . This sort of propaganda was done, and then they slowly understood. And the rich were opposing it. . . . Our father would have nothing to do with this propaganda. . . . They did this propaganda in a single day, holding a gathering. Several kolkhozes were gathered at the administration, which was in a former rich man's house, they gathered there and had a meeting. It was a secret meeting. They were afraid to have an open meeting.

Polvonboev, who had been dekulakized, said that being exiled to Bekobod "saved our lives," creating the opportunity for his de-kulakized family to start anew, when in Andijon they would not have been permitted to make a living. In Andijon region, the rich staged an uprising in 1931, refusing to join collectives, and as a result many were arrested and exiled.

While the wealthy opposed forming the kolkhoz, Polvonboev said the the poor formed the kolkhoz without really knowing what they were doing: "People without understanding formed the kolkhoz. No good explanations were given to the people. There will be a kolkhoz, and everyone will sleep on one quilt, it was said. They said senseless things, they lied. Whoever joins, their wives and children will all lie in a row on a quilt. . . people said idiotic things." Regardless of class identity, informants remembered these stories, but some attributed them to the rich, while others simply used them to explain why some in their communities were not as eager as they had been to join the collective farm.

In these few examples, class identity shaped stories about collectivization. Those who strongly asserted their identity as poor continued, 70 years later, to portray themselves as active participants in opposing and dispossessing the rich. Those who were rich knew that kulaks had been dispossessed, but did not directly implicate the poor in creating that fate.

Interestingly, all of these interviewees later became Party members, rather surprisingly in the case of Polvonboev, the kulak. And all of them viewed collectivization as ultimately positive, although there were many hardships. Polvonboev, the exiled kulak, said that had there been no collectivization, his family would have continued to have a good life in Andijon, where, he stressed, they provided food for the poor every day. But he was prouder of what had been accomplished on his showpiece collective farm in Bekobod. He said:

We were cut off and on May 24, 1932 we were brought here, to Dalvarz. . . One thousand four hundred and some households were brought here from the Valley [Fargana]. . . We were forced. Without force, who would have brought this region to abundance? When we came to Dalvarz, there was not even a single tree here. All of us were brought from the Valley, we brought trees, fruit trees. We planted all the trees.

Holmetov, also from a wealthy family, but later an active kolkhoz leader, disparaged the collective farm for allowing lazy people to live without working hard, but he noted that before collectivization, every family had to make all of their own necessities, while, “When things changed to the kolkhoz, this is about the former Soviet government, the Soviet government slowly but surely brought in culture.”

Not surprisingly, the assessments of our “poor” farmers on collectivization were more strongly positive. Ulug’xo’jaev said: “My final conclusion on collectivization is that collectivization was very necessary. If there were no collectivization, the people would have been uncoordinated and ill, without collectivization it would have been hard for the farmers to make a living, we would not have had all this land and water here. . .” While the richer interviewees remembered their charity to the poor as a positive aspect of individual farming, the poorer interviewees repeatedly used the phrase “working in the doors of the rich,” or “seeking at the doors of the rich,” to illustrate their powerlessness and dependence before collectivization.

In these interviews, a basic antagonism between those who had been rich and those who had been poor still comes through in the stories of the poor seven decades after the dramatic beginning of collectivization. This story of class division was reinforced throughout the Soviet period, but we would argue that its success as a ubiquitous narrative about the past points to its relevance to rural people's self-understandings in the 1920s. The Party's intentional agitation, geared toward stirring up class conflict in Uzbekistan, found resonance among the rural poor.

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