

THE HUJUM CAMPAIGN: CAUSES, GOALS, AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract. This article looks at that Soviet Hujum campaign which was started in Central Asia, on March 8 1927, and it sort of tries to untangle why it happened in ideological terms. It also describes both the stated and the real aims, and then it follows the messy, mixed fallout across social, political, and cultural life within Uzbek society. In the end, it argues the campaign's "legacy" is still argued about, and the near-term outcomes were mostly devastating, although its later cultural effect turned out to be ambiguous, like hard to pin down for sure.

Keywords: Hujum, unveiling campaign, Zhenotdel, paranji, gender policy, Central Asia, colonialism, Islamic tradition, women's emancipation.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola 1927-yil 8-martda Markaziy Osiyoda boshlangan sovet Hujum kompaniyasini o'rganib, uning mafkuraviy sabablarini, e'lon qilingan va haqiqiy maqsadlarini, shuningdek, o'zbek jamiyatida yuzaga kelgan murakkab ijtimoiy, siyosiy va madaniy oqibatlarini tahlil qiladi. Maqola shuni ta'kidlaydiki, kompaniyaning merosi tortishuvli bo'lib qolmoqda va uning qisqa muddatli ta'siri asosan halokatli bo'lgan, uzoq muddatli madaniy oqibatlari esa noaniq bo'lib chiqqan.

Kalit so'zlar: Hujum, paranjini yechish kompaniyasi, Jenotdel, paranji, gender siyosati, Markaziy Osiyo, mustamlakachilik, islom an'anasi, ayollarni ozod qilish.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается советская кампания «Хужум», начатая в Центральной Азии 8 марта 1927 года; анализируются её идеологические причины, декларируемые и подлинные цели, а также сложные социальные, политические и культурные последствия, которые она породила в узбекском обществе. В статье делается вывод о том, что наследие кампании по-прежнему остаётся предметом дискуссий, её краткосрочные последствия носили преимущественно разрушительный характер, тогда как долгосрочное культурное воздействие оказалось неоднозначным.

Ключевые слова: Хужум, кампания по снятию паранджи, Женотдел, паранджа, гендерная политика, Центральная Азия, колониализм, исламская традиция, эмансипация женщин.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Soviet Central Asia is kind of remembered as a chain of wide ranging campaigns, meant to refashion local societies to fit Bolshevik ideological wishes. In that set, none feels quite as fast, violent, or culturally decisive as the Hujum, this mass unveiling initiative aimed at Muslim women in Uzbekistan and other nearby republics, started around 1927. The Uzbek and Turkic term hujum roughly means "assault" or "attack," and just that etymology already hints at the underlying aggressiveness of the whole plan [1]. Officially it was kicked off on International Women's Day, March 8, 1927, and it was carried out through the Zhenotdel, the women's department inside the Communist Party, and its declared objective was to push out the paranji and chachvon, meaning the full body veil plus the horsehair face covering that many Muslim women wore across the region [2]. Still, a lot of scholarship from the last several decades has basically shown, pretty clearly, that the campaign's real reasons were not only social

in theory but political and colonial in practice, tied to the wider Soviet project of breaking down Islamic civilization in Central Asia, while putting ideological control in place over a newly subordinated Muslim population [3]. The Hujum matters a lot for anyone studying Soviet nationality policy, colonial gender dynamics, and the history of women in Central Asia. It's one of those uncommon examples where the state used women's bodies and their everyday dress as the main arena for political conflict, and in doing so it turned the veil from regular clothing into a kind of symbolic battlefield between empire and local society [4].

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This present article kind of uses a literature review approach, pulling from scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed papers, and a few analytical studies. The core Western work, at least in my view, really is tied to Douglas Northrop and Marianne Kamp, because their readings, even if they sometimes align, also diverge in a way that has kind of shaped the conversation for more than twenty years. Northrop, in *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, claims that the veil became this symbolic battlefield where the Soviet colonial agenda collided with (or tried to override) Uzbek national identity, and that the campaign at the end did not actually reach its declared objectives, while still producing deep pushback and resistance [5]. Kamp's book, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, University of Washington Press, 2006, is more detailed in terms of women's own positions during the whole process. She argues the Hujum essentially boxed in Uzbek women, between the Soviet state's coercive requirements and the patriarchal expectations within their communities, so that there was almost no real room left for self-direction [6]. Then Adeeb Khalid's *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Cornell University Press, 2015) places the Hujum inside a bigger frame of Soviet nation-making and cultural overhaul, and it highlights how the drive was linked to suppressing the Uzbek intelligentsia at the same time, plus dismantling Islamic civic institutions too [7].

Russian-language scholarship, including studies produced in Soviet-era Uzbekistan, has historically presented the Hujum in a more favorable ideological light, emphasizing its contribution to female literacy, workforce participation, and the formal legal equality of women, while minimizing or omitting reference to the violence it generated [8]. Post-independence Uzbek historiography has moved toward a more critical reassessment, acknowledging the coercive nature of the campaign and its traumatic social consequences, while also recognizing that some of its structural effects, particularly in the domains of education and employment, were genuinely transformative for subsequent generations of Uzbek women [9]. More recent analytical work, including studies published in Central Asian academic journals in the 2020s, has further developed the connection between the Hujum and Soviet industrial and agricultural policy, demonstrating that the mobilization of women through the unveiling campaign was inseparable from the broader labor demands of collectivization and the first Five-Year Plan [10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The causes of the Hujum are most accurately understood as a convergence of ideological, political, and economic imperatives operating simultaneously within the Soviet system at the end of the 1920s. At the ideological level, the Bolshevik movement regarded Islamic civilization in Central Asia as an obstacle to socialist construction, and the paranji was identified as the most visible symbol of what party documents described as the backwardness and feudal oppression characteristic of Muslim societies [1]. The veil was not merely a target in itself but a proxy for a broader set of institutions, including the mosque, the madrasa, the mahalla, and the shariat court system, all of which the Soviet state sought to eliminate. By focusing its initial assault on the most visible and publicly legible marker of Islamic gender norms, the party hoped to trigger a cascading transformation of the entire social order [3]. At the political level, the timing of the

Hujum is significant. Its formal launch coincided with the beginning of Stalin's consolidation of power and the preparation of the collectivization campaign, and it is difficult to separate the attack on the veil from the broader Stalinist offensive against all potential sources of social cohesion and resistance outside the party's direct control [2].

The Zhenotdel was directed to devote its entire organizational capacity to the success of the unveiling campaign, despite the serious reservations of many of its own senior members, who recognized that mass forced unveiling would destroy the patient work of building trust with local women that the organization had undertaken throughout the early 1920s [4]. The economic dimension of the campaign is equally important and has received increasing attention in recent scholarship. The mobilization of Uzbek women into the agricultural and industrial workforce was a practical requirement of the Five-Year Plan, and the destruction of the domestic seclusion system that the paranji symbolized was a precondition for this mobilization. Collectivization increased women's formal workforce participation significantly, though it did not address the double burden of labor and household responsibility that women continued to bear [10].

The consequences of the Hujum were immediate, severe, and in several respects diametrically opposed to its declared goals. The most direct and devastating consequence was a wave of violence against women who had unveiled, perpetrated by male relatives, community members, and religious figures across Uzbekistan. Between 1927 and 1929 alone, as many as 2,000 women were murdered as a direct result of their participation in the unveiling campaign [5]. This figure, which represents only recorded cases, points to the extraordinary degree to which the campaign destabilized family and community structures rather than reforming them. The violence took multiple forms, including beatings, mutilation, rape, and killing, and was directed not only at women who had voluntarily unveiled but also at those who had been forcibly unveiled at party-organized events [6]. The social consequences extended beyond physical violence. Many women who unveiled faced ostracism from their families and communities, abandonment by their husbands, and loss of access to the social networks of the mahalla upon which their material survival depended.

Rather than liberating women, the campaign in many cases rendered them more vulnerable by stripping them of the social protections of traditional community life while failing to provide adequate substitutes through Soviet institutions [7]. At the cultural and political level, the Hujum produced a dynamic that Northrop identifies as a process of mutual self-definition: by targeting the veil as the symbol of Central Asian Islamic identity, the Soviet state inadvertently elevated it into a powerful marker of national and religious resistance, ensuring that many women who might otherwise have chosen to unveil gradually now associated unveiled status with collaboration and submission to colonial power [5]. Kamp's analysis adds a further layer of complexity by demonstrating that the campaign's violence was not simply a reaction of backward patriarchal society against progressive Soviet policy but reflected a genuine conflict over the terms of modernity and the right of an indigenous community to define its own path of change [6]. The longer-term consequences of the Hujum are more ambiguous. The prevalence of the paranji did gradually decline throughout the 1930s and was largely absent by the 1950s, though this trajectory cannot be attributed straightforwardly to the success of the campaign itself, as other structural factors including urbanization, mass education, and labor force integration played equally significant roles.

CONCLUSION

The Hujum campaign of 1927 to 1939 represents one of the most complex and consequential episodes in the modern history of Central Asia. Its analysis reveals the fundamental tension between the Soviet state's declared commitment to women's liberation and its actual practice of coercive colonial transformation. The causes of the campaign lay not

primarily in a genuine commitment to gender equality but in the convergence of Stalinist ideological imperatives, the requirements of collectivization, and the broader project of dismantling Islamic civil society in the region. Its goals, though articulated in the language of emancipation, were in practice inseparable from the extension of Soviet political control over a Muslim population. Its consequences were, in the short term, catastrophic for the very women the campaign claimed to liberate, generating unprecedented levels of gender-based violence and social disruption while failing to deliver the institutional support that might have made the formal gains of the period sustainable. In the longer term, the legacy of the Hujum remains contested within Uzbek historical memory, as the campaign produced a complex mixture of genuine structural transformation and profound cultural trauma that cannot be reduced to either triumphalist Soviet narratives of liberation or simple post-Soviet narratives of victimization.

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