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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Remittances, rituals, and reconsidering women's norms in *mahallas*: Emigrant labour and its social effects in Ferghana Valley

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Remittances, rituals, and reconsidering women's norms in *mahallas*: Emigrant labour and its social effects in Ferghana Valley

This paper describes recent economic and social changes in Central Asian neighbourhood communities known as *mahallas*, using data from a town in the Ferghana Valley. First, the paper examines how the increasing costs of life-cycle rituals are damaging the harmony of mahallas. Since 2007, more and more hosts have begun to outsource the provision of food and services for these rituals, using money acquired mostly through emigrant labour. This in turn lessens mahallas' mutual aid practices, and reveals emerging economic disparities between neighbours. Secondly, the paper argues that emigration has had transformative effects on the lifestyles of Muslim women in mahallas. With the globalization of their economy, conventional local norms are becoming harder to obey, and some young and middle-aged women are choosing to live outside these norms. Dependence on emigrant labour and the associated remittances has significantly affected the lifestyles and morals of mahalla inhabitants.

Keywords: mahalla, emigrant labour, social change, ritual, gender

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine tensions between the reputation of *mahalla*s – neighbourhood communities in settled society in Central Asia – as places where traditions are preserved, and the social changes that have recently occurred in these mahallas as a result of emigrant labour. We begin by describing what a mahalla is, and then review problematic areas in mahalla studies.

From ancient times until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was possible to divide the Central Asian ways of life into two broad categories: those of settled peoples, and those of nomadic peoples (Levi 2007). Of the two, the word *mahalla*s, meaning small collectives comprised of several houses along a town street, are indicative of settled societies, and are known to have been autonomous organizations of residents in the nineteenth century, with a council of elders guiding the collective morals, performing life-cycle rituals for the residents, distributing water and other resources, and resolving disputes among members (Dadabaev 2006; Geiss 2001, 2003; Sukhareva 1962, 1966).

Even after the Soviet regime was established in the early twentieth century, mahallas did not lose their influence over their citizens. The Soviet regime used them to manage residents, and they served as a buffer and a bridge between the national government and local collectives during the Soviet era (Tashbaeva and Savurov 1989). Under this policy, the pre-modern modes of life in the mahalla did not disappear completely, and some traditional elements of the mahalla were reconstituted in combination with the modern system and infrastructure created by the Soviets. For example, it was reported that life-cycle rituals– which prominent Soviet ethnographers such as O. A. Sukhareva, M. A. Bikzhanova and K. L. Zadykhina regarded as vestiges of traditional feudal society that should disappear before long(Bikzhanova, Zadykhina and Sukhareva 1962) –were celebrated as grand events and important occasions for

networking and making the connections needed to succeed in Soviet society (Koroteyeva and Makarova 1998).

Since the last years of the Soviet Union, mahallas began to receive much more attention from the people who regarded mahallas as the main source of the region's traditions. For example, Soviet ethnographer S. P. Poliakov (1992) outspokenly depicted how mahallas have preserved pre-Soviet traditional customs, values, and economic practices in Central Asia. He intended to accuse the mahallas of being responsible for the region's stagnation during that period.

On the contrary, however, the new national elites of Central Asia that emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union, rated mahallas highly in their search for a national ideology, and traditional values in place of socialism (Roy 2000, 181-183). Perhaps the Government of Uzbekistan achieved this goal best. According to E. Massicard and T. Trevisani (2003), the Government began to view the mahalla as a source of ethnic culture and morals in 1993, and has touted governance of the residents through the mahallas as a reversion to the original traditions of the Uzbek people. Along with this high evaluation, Uzbekistan started paying salaries to mahalla committees composed of local residents, which they regarded as street-level local government organizations, delegating some of the administrative responsibilities for residents' welfare, health, sanitation, and public safety to the mahalla committees (Arifxanova 2000; Jalilov 1995). Note, however, that in this paper, mahalla refers not to the smallest governmental unit, but to neighbourhood communities based on the everyday communications and actions

of the people who lived in them, whose extents were sometimes different from those of the governmental units.

It is not only government officials who consider the mahallas as the core of their traditions, but also the inhabitants themselves. M. Liu (2012) reported that the inhabitants of Osh in the Ferghana Valley perceived their mahallas as the primary sites of their ethnic authenticity.

However, though it might be true that the mahallas have deep ties with old local customs and values, it is not enough for researches to consider only their relations with the past. The reason for this lies in the recent situation in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where globalization, or 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens 1990, 21), has been promoted through emigrant labour. This emigrant labour, mainly to Russia, began to increase in the mid-1990s in Tajikistan, at the end of the decade in Kyrgyzstan, and at the beginning of the 2000s in Uzbekistan, largely due to demographic pressures from the sending countries, and a shortage of workers in Russia (Thorez 2014, 225).

J. Thorez (2014, 225) estimated that about 2 million people from Uzbekistan, 1 million from Tajikistan, and 0.5 million from Kyrgyzstan, were working in Russia in 2008. These numbers would be greater if irregular migrants were included (Mansoor and Quillin (eds.) 2007, 45), because some factors favourable to Central Asian migrations exist in Russia. These factors include the Russian language as a lingua

franca in the former Soviet Union, and the relatively low costs of transportation coupled with Russian legislation that allows nationals from, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to enter without a visa, and stay for 90 days with a temporary residency authorization (Sadovskaya 2013, 31; Thorez 2014, 227).

Most of the migrant workers are men, and their remittances are crucial for their families. It is estimated that the amounts of remittances from Russia to Tajikistan could have been as high as 40-50% of the GDP in Tajikistan in the2000s (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2012, 13). Besides Russia, the main destinations for Central Asian workers are diversified, and include Kazakhstan, the United States, European countries, and the Middle Eastern countries (Sadovskaya 2013, 33-34). E. Sadovskaya estimated that the '25 to 35 percent of Kyrgyzstan's economically active population is abroad', similar to that in Tajikistan, and the migration wave from Uzbekistan was also on the rise in the late 2000s (Sadovskaya 2013, 30). Thus, it is only natural that the growing scale of remittances and cross-border movements are intensifying the penetration of capitalism and its mode of living in these three countries, and stimulating societal changes.

Recent studies on migrant labour and its social effects in Central Asia by E. Isabaeva (2011) and I. Rubinov (2014) depict how the remittances of Kyrgyz workers help to maintain social ties for the families left in their hometowns, but their focus is on how remittances reproduce the existing social structure, and not on how they alter the society. On the contrary, S. Massot (2013a, 2013b) carefully observes personal but typical changes of identities and bodily mannerisms among many Uzbek migrants, and

points out their undermining effects on the traditional family hierarchy and social orders. I would like to extend this perspective regarding changes into the mahallas, to develop the argument with respect to social transformations in Central Asia.

The questions this paper explores, then, are as follows: Is the mahalla an undefeatable and unchangeable 'traditional' fortress, impervious to the wave of globalization sweeping in through the emigrant labour? If not, how do the remittances transform the lifestyles and morals of the people in the mahallas? The first purpose of this paper is to answer these questions, by analysing the changing landscapes and life-cycle rituals in the mahallas of the Ferghana Valley, which is densely populated by several ethnic groups, and which shares borders with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Another problematic area of mahalla research pertains to preconceived ideas regarding the status of women. The role of Muslim women in the mahallas of Central Asia has been a source of major controversy since the beginning of the Soviet period. The Soviet government regarded the Muslim women living under Islamic law (*shariat*) and local customs as victims of a feudal and patriarchal social system who ought to be liberated, so it initiated their liberation movement known as the *Hujum*, to encourage literacy, urged the removal of veils, and imposed prohibitions against early marriages, polygamy, and bride prices in the late 1920s (Kamp 2006; Massell 1974; Northlop 2004). Though initially there was a major backlash, as Soviet society developed, Muslim women in Central Asia began participating in society to a greater degree

(Constantine 2001). S. Akiner (1997, 275) concluded, however, that there was scarcely any redefinition of gender roles in the family life of Central Asia, so most of the Muslim women there had to bear the triple burden of housework, childcare, and paid labour.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new national governments did not promote feminism, but emphasized women's crucial roles as mothers and transmitters of the ethnic culture. While there are Central Asian researchers who insist that the women of the mahalla are comfortably protected (Alimova and Azimova 2000), there are others, mostly Western researchers, who point out problems associated with gender concepts that emphasize motherhood in Central Asia, or problems associated with administering social welfare policies for women through the mahalla committees (Harris 2004; Kamp 2004). In fact, with globalization and the economic and social changes caused by massive male out-migration in recent years, the lifestyles of Muslim women in post-Soviet Central Asia are becoming increasingly diverse. We can see some details of these changes in M. Reeves (2011), who points out problematic gender structures in a detached territory of Uzbekistan through the cases of women staying there whose husbands migrate, and A. Ismailbekova (2014), who argues that the women in rural Kyrgyzstan who stay behind maintain patriarchal orders and strong patrilineal descent in the absence of men. In this paper, I will focus on changes to Muslim women's activities and ways of life in mahallas in a town in southern Ferghana Valley, and show how local norms for them have been shaken in the era of massive emigration.

Fieldwork

This research is based on the anthropological fieldwork I conducted over a period of ten years in the town of Saray(pseudonym), situated in the southern part of the Ferghana Valley. I consider Saray's case to be representative of typical settled rural society in Central Asia, because approximately one quarter of the region's total population is concentrated in this Ferghana Valley (Note.1).

Saray is a small town that had a population of about 30,000 in 2000 (Note.2). The main ethnic groups in Saray are the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. However, most of the residents can speak both languages, and intermarriages between the two are common, since they share the lifestyles and customs of the settled peoples of Central Asia. For this reason, I regard them as one group of settled Muslims in Central Asia for this article. There are also small numbers of Kyrgyz, Russian, and Tatar residents in the region.

I first visited the town in 2001, and lived there for about one-and-a-half years between 2002 and 2004, with brief interruptions, collecting information about the mahalla life mainly through interviews in the Uzbek language, as well as attending many life-cycle rituals and events in the mahalla. Since 2006, I have returned for about one month almost every year, to talk with people about recent social changes. I did not want to stress the people I spoke with by taping my interviews, and subsequently transcribed key conversations into notebooks. I later confirmed my understanding with

another face-to-face conversation, or by telephone if their intent was unclear. The next section documents how an increased cash flow in the small town of Saray changed the mahallas' landscapes and people's lifestyles during the ten years from 2002 to 2012.

The growth and development of agriculture and pottery

Saray's two major industries have for centuries been agriculture and pottery (Peshchereva 1959), and both industries developed somewhat in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Let us treat agriculture first. After 2004, I observed that more and more people in the town began to engage in agriculture, using greenhouses to produce fruits and vegetables irrespective of the season, and to grow higher-priced market products. For example, one of my host family's neighbouring households began a side business raising lemons in a greenhouse on their property in 2006. Lemons were not yet a very familiar food for the residents of Saray, but it was widely known that they were effective in lowering blood pressure. Since there were many people with high blood pressure in the town, there was a steady demand for lemons, even at a high price, throughout the year. This household had formerly grown herbs and tomatoes, but these could be sold only for a pittance when they were in season, so they had the idea of growing lemons instead. Such ingenuities led to a growth in the quality and quantity of agricultural products, and, as a result, by 2012 the size of the food bazaar in Saray had been enlarged to two or three times the size it had been in 2002.

Making pottery has been another pillar of the town's industries, and Saray was the site of the largest pottery factory in Central Asia during the Soviet period, when it employed more than 2000 people (Rakhimov 1961). This pottery plant went bankrupt after independence, but many residents, searching for a way to make a living, built kilns and workshops on their own properties, and were able to make and sell pottery, once again giving Saray a reputation for pottery production (Kikuta 2009, 2013a, 2013b). A bazaar selling daily-use pottery is held once or twice a week, and several pottery-studio shops sell pottery to foreign tourists.

Emigrant labour and changes in the mahalla townscape

In addition to agriculture and pottery, emigrant labour became very popular in Saray since around 2005. While in a mahalla in 2012, I counted twelve houses along its main street. Of the people who lived in these houses, fifteen were pensioners, thirty-three were working adults, and twelve other adults, who would have lived there, were working abroad, mainly in Russia.

Evidently, this labour has produced a significant economic income for many residents, and the look of the town changed rapidly in the late 2000s and 2010s. When I began my fieldwork in Saray in 2002, the bazaar and shops in the centre of town seemed deserted. By 2012, however, several dozen individually owned shops had opened in the town centre. The quantity of ready-made clothing, shoes, bags, cosmetics, electrical appliances, and sundries available had increased, as had the range of quality.

Cafés, where shoppers could take a break, also appeared near the shopping area. In 2002, the only café in Saray was located in the park in the centre of town, but as of 2012, five cafés were located near the bazaar, where shoppers could enjoy coffee, tea, cakes, and light meals. There had also been a tenfold increase in the number of *choyxona* – restaurants where one could eat pilaf or kebabs and drink vodka – but these establishments were frequented almost exclusively by men. Establishments that welcomed all customers, regardless of age or sex, were considered cafés by the townspeople. The increased number of cafés signified an increase in the number of women and young people who not only passed their leisure time at home, but also spent time and money outside the home.

In July 2011, a magnitude 5 earthquake struck the region and many houses were damaged. Following the earthquake, the town appeared to experience a construction boom. When visiting 6 out of 17 mahallas in the spring of 2012, I noticed bricks, stones, wood, and other construction materials piled in front of many houses. Some people complained to me that construction workers such as carpenters and plasterers were constantly busy and hard to hire. Many people were not only repairing the parts of their houses that had been damaged, but were also remodelling and expanding them. These activities indicated how much people were able to pay. Without question, the townspeople have access to more money than they did ten years ago, and there are more activities involving the circulation and consumption of goods and services.

People using cell phones on Saray's mahalla streets also became a noteworthy new sight after 2006. In 2003, cell phone service was available only in major cities of the Ferghana Valley, and there were only old telephone lines in the town of Saray. Since the circuits had a low capacity, it was difficult to send an e-mail message of more than a few dozen kilobytes, even if one were able to connect to the Internet. The cell phone sets themselves were expensive (US$200–$500, or four to ten times the average monthly wage, and that was without the call charges) and large, so very few people had them. However, in the second half of the decade, prices for handsets and call charges dropped, calling areas were expanded, payment methods became simpler, and the use of cell phones spread with explosive speed. I estimate that approximately six to eight out of ten teenagers in Saray had their own cell phones in 2012.

Even middle-aged and older people carried cell phones, instead of relying on old fixed telephones, and young people used them skilfully for calls, e-mails, and to access the Internet. Emigrant workers were especially likely to have smartphones, and bought them for their families, in order to speak with them using a calling application. There is no doubt that emigrant labour has brought the town the advent of the information revolution.

Changes to ritual life in the mahallas

Economic growth and increasing cash incomes have led to various changes in the life-cycle rituals that are an important nucleus of mahalla life. We examine this point in the following section.

Muslim life-cycle rituals: compressed time and increased expenses

Life-cycle rituals of all sorts occupy a great deal of life in the mahalla. The Muslims of Central Asia hold celebratory gatherings (*to'y*) for each of life's milestones. These include 'cradle celebrations' to mark the birth of a child, parties to celebrate the circumcision of an infant boy, and banquets to celebrate weddings. During these celebrations, they host banquets to which their families and several hundred people from the mahalla are invited. This act is thought to bring them great honour (Kikuta 2011).

These customs have undergone some changes with the recent increases in people's incomes. First, looking at these rituals in terms of time, there has been a tendency since independence to shorten the life-cycle rituals, and this tendency has really taken hold in the past ten years. Based on what I was told, before the Soviet period and in the relatively stable 1970s and 1980s, wedding receptions were thought to start from the moment the wheat flour for the bread that was to be served to the guests was ground, and an oven set up to bake the bread. The occasion lasted a week. Beginning around 2000, however, receptions were held over one or two days. Banquets that were formerly held on several occasions are now consolidated into a one-day event.

A woman in her fifties explained this phenomenon to me in 2006 as follows: ‘After independence, we shortened the rituals partly because we had shortages, but now, everyone is busy with work earning money, so we have little time to attend social occasions and have decided to finish everything in one day’.

As the time devoted to rituals decreased, there was a tendency to increase the amount of money spent. I estimate that in 2003, one could host normal wedding banquets for about US$1,000-1,500, but costs had leapt to US$6,000-10,000 by 2014 (Note.3). In addition to inflation, these prices must be influenced by increases in income, and the recent tendency of people to reduce their physical and temporal burdens by exchanging money for the time and services that people used to provide. For example, meat pies served to hundreds of guests who attend a circumcision would be cheaper if they were baked at home, rather than if they were bought, but since baking them takes time and effort, more and more people have recently started hiring special cooks to make meat pies. Some people no longer hold banquets in their own homes. Until 2007, the town of Saray did not have a banquet hall, called *to‘y xona,* for life-cycle rituals. Instead, it was common practice to invite guests to one’s own courtyard for these ceremonies. This changed in 2007, when the first to‘y xona was built in Saray, and by 2012, six halls had been built, where paid employees now procure, cook, and serve the ceremonial food, and clean up after the event. These halls, which promise ease and spacious surroundings, are dramatically more expensive than giving a party in one’s own home, but they are attracting people despite the high costs.

It is customary for the in-laws to exchange or give a variety of goods and display them at these life-cycle rituals. At a wedding ceremony, for example, the groom's family and the bride's family, including the parents, the siblings, the grandparents, the aunts and uncles, and any other close relatives, exchange gifts. Recent increases in income for many residents have led to an increase in the number and prices of these gifts. The Government of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan occasionally advises people to simplify their life-cycle rituals and decrease the number of gifts (Kandiyoti and Azimova 2004, 37; Rahmonova-Schwarz 2012, 111), but Many residents in Saray, even if advised by the mahalla committee to reduce the number of gifts given during life-cycle rituals, maintain appearances by increasing the quality of each gift.

There has also been an increase in the types of standard gift items, possibly because of the greater abundance of goods available in the bazaars. In the first few years of the twenty-first century, it was customary for the bride's parents to provide the cradle for the 'cradle celebrations', but in recent years it has become common practice for the parents to provide toys, a potty chair, a stroller, and even clothes for the groom's parents, thereby creating an increasingly heavy burden.

Harmony being lost?

Until now, the social functions associated with the large banquets and exchange of gifts in Central Asia, have been analysed as establishing useful networks for households, and stabilizing communites by promoting reciprocity among neighbours and relatives

(Kandiyoti 1998; Koroteyeva and Makarova 1998; Werner 1998). In other words, life-cycle rituals played a role in maintaining a mahalla's peace, and households' safety, by forcing residents to stay in good relations with their neighbours and relatives in order to manage life-cycle rituals. However, these ritualistic social functions are now facing a crisis. They cannot solve cases of moral hazard caused by the desire for money, and the emerging economic disparity could threaten a mahalla's harmony and security.

I begin this discussion by giving some examples of moral hazards in Saray's mahallas. As already noted, after independence there was a sudden increase in the number of individual households in Saray producing pottery, so people began using household gas and electricity for firing and finishing pottery. The result was a shortage of the gas and electricity needed for everyday living during those early years of the twenty-first century. Power shortages were not the only problem. Some households did not practice proper disposal of the toxic chemicals used for glazing, and instead just poured them on the ground. Since these acts caused a great deal of trouble for their neighbours in the mahalla, they received warnings from other residents of the neighbourhood, and from the mahalla committee, but some people making pottery countered with the question, 'What other way do we have to make a living?' and were not easily persuaded to behave differently. People of the mahalla applied the sanction of excluding members of the offending households from life-cycle rituals and other gatherings, but even so, the situation did not change very much. At last, the authorities

limited the establishment of kilns to the suburbs in the latter half of the decade, and there has been a gradual improvement in the situation.

These events confirm that relying on the social function of life-cycle rituals to integrate residents is losing its effect. As people with a lot of money can hold life-cycle rituals without the partnership of other residents, it is becoming harder for the mahallas to solve moral hazards without the coercive power of the government. The situation was very different in 2003, when several of my host family's households held wedding banquets in their courtyards. At that time, it was common to use tables and chairs from the mahalla's joint properties for guests, and to borrow hundreds of dishes from neighbours. More than ten neighbours used to spend a night together before the banquet, to pare kilos of carrots and onions for pilaf, the typical main dish. During the feasts, hosts and guests sometimes even used the neighbours' toilets, because they did not want to walk in front of other guests to go to a toilet that was usually built in the courtyard. These cooperative behaviours are unnecessary if one holds banquets at the to'y xona, the privately operated hall. Thus, the traditional practice of providing mutual aid for life-cycle rituals is evidently decreasing (Note.4) .

By offering various feasts, and exchanging presents with in-laws in front of guests, life-cycle rituals have become obvious displays of growing economic disparities. Donoxon(not her real name), a woman in her sixties who was a former schoolteacher, recalled that in the Soviet era, the regime could demand an explanation from families who hosted excessively luxurious banquets, as to where they had found the resources to

do so, and consequently people refrained from holding such banquets. In contrast, now people who earn a lot tend to hold life-cycle rituals that are as large as possible without hesitation. However, this behaviour could be a source of envy, and worsen security in the mahallas. Some robberies in Saray between 2012 and 2013 contributed to this anxiety. One of the victims was a relative of my informant, who was in her forties in 2012. She told me that the victim and many residents were sure that the criminals must have come from Saray, because they broke into only those homes where all the male members in their prime were working abroad. They seemed to have known which families had a lot of emigrant labour income.

Some of the criminals were arrested shortly afterward, and the mahalla committee reinforced its patrolling, so that the town recovered its sense of safety. However, life-cycle rituals in recent years have revealed growing economic disparities, which could be a source of schisms in the mahalla. Donoxon confided to me in 2012 that she had been living alone for about ten years, while her one and only son worked abroad. According to her story, she kept wearing humble clothes and saying to her neighbours that she had no excess money. ‘I’m afraid of people’s jealousy’ she said, ‘and it is good if they think I have less money, or robbers may come here because I’m all alone at night!’

Shaking up notions about the ideal image of Muslim women

Over the past decade, notable changes have occurred in the lives of the Muslim women in Saray. As a result, mahalla residents' images of the ideal woman have been shaken. I examine these phenomena in the following section.

Changes in Muslim women lives before and after the Soviet period

Islam came to Central Asia since around the eighth century and a series of Islamic kingdoms subsequently rose and fell. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ferghana region became a territory under the Russian Empire, which was expanding southward. The Russian Empire did not interfere in the local Muslim society, and instead controlled the people mostly by levying taxes (Brower 1997). During that time, Muslim women were supposed to make every effort to avoid contact with any males other than their husbands or other family members. Though a small number of wealthy women ran businesses or used Arabic letters to read books or write poetry, most of Muslim women living in that era occupied spaces separate from those lived in by men (Harris 1996). My interview informants confirmed that this was an accurate description of the lives of women in Saray in the early twentieth century.

Beginning in the Soviet era, Muslim women in the town were urged to become educated at school, and participate in paid labour. During World War II, the military draft led to a scarcity of men in Saray, and women assumed active roles working in factories and fields (Kikuta 2009). Women continued broadening their societal roles after the war. However, there was not much of a change in gender roles in the home,

where women continued to bear the main burdens for housework and child-care (Akiner 1997, 275).

Many residents recalled the period that lasted for several years after independence in 1991 as a difficult time, during which the lives of most women in the town underwent major upheavals. The main workplaces, including the pottery factory, the textile factory, and the collective farms, went out of business. During this time, they earned small amounts of money by taking advantage of price differences for various substances in different towns, working together with their entire family to make pottery, and exploring other ventures. As a result, almost all able-bodied women are now engaged in some activities aimed at earning cash incomes. I discuss these circumstances in the following section.

Active Muslim women

Many women in Saray worked in government workplaces such as city halls and schools during the late Soviet period. Many of them were non-Muslim Russian women, but almost all of them left for Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union, so the percentage of Muslim women in government workplaces grew steadily after the late 1990s, and almost all elementary school teachers are now women. The town's Muslim women are even finding success on mahalla committees. In 2002, it was assumed that leadership positions on any of the town's seventeen mahalla committees would be held by men, but in 2012, women accounted for one-third of the committee chairs.

Even in the world of private business, women are enjoying success in running businesses with their husbands or families. For example, in 1990s designated jobs for women in Saray's major industry of pottery included drawing designs or finishing and polishing the products. Today, many women continue to do those jobs, but they also transport heavy clay, travel to large cities to sell their products to wholesalers or to negotiate deals, or fire pots in the kilns, a job that was forbidden to them in the early twentieth century. Many women, in addition to engaging in public employment that allows them to receive a pension, have side jobs such as cultivating produce for sale in their gardens, serving as tutors in cram schools, selling precious metals, or making sweets and light meals to sell at the bazaar.

Upheavals in norms and new role models

The Muslim women of Saray are busy in their work, with housekeeping, and raising children, but their activities are restricted. Muslim residents quietly share norms prescribing social behaviours such as 'Muslim women should be like this', and although these norms have not been set down in writing, those who violate them are criticized, become the subject of gossip, and are looked at askance. Based on my discussions with people, I can aggregate these norms into the following two points.

(1) It is best for Muslim women to marry men from the same town, and not move far away.

What this means, in other words, is that women from good families should stay within the confines that allow their parents to keep an eye on them. People thought that in doing so, they would not become acquainted with any men from distant places, and would marry someone from the neighbourhood, where they could live safely and happily. In the region, even after marriage, Muslim women receive gifts such as cattle and sheep from their birth families when they sponsor life-cycle rituals such as the circumcision of their sons. Economic and social ties with their families of origin continue to be deep and long lasting, so that they can recuperate in their parents' homes when they are ill. Therefore, most people consider it desirable for women to live as close as possible to their parents' homes.

There is another norm that a Muslim woman should remain a virgin until her marriage. A chaste girl will not become acquainted with men from outside the town, and ought to marry someone of her parents' choosing from within the town. Occasionally, there are instances in which the custom of proving the bride's virginity to the groom's parents after the wedding is observed, and if she is judged not to be a virgin, she is accused of being an immoral woman and will inevitably be divorced. One mahalla committee woman proudly told me in 2002 that she could distinguish between the red mark of a virgin's blood and the blood of some animals, because she had seen blood samples for many years. The teachings of Islam do not absolutely require a bride to be a virgin, but as in Mediterranean and other societies (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers

(eds.) 1992), Central Asian Muslim society still believes that carefully controlling the sexuality of women is connected with the family's honour.

Now, the spread of emigrant work and the information revolution have made it even more difficult to abide by these norms, but violating them leads to sanctions in the form of gossip. For example, in the spring of 2012, the town was abuzz with talk about a young woman who married a man she had met through social networks on her cell phone. He was not only from outside of Saray, but from outside the Ferghana Valley. Of the residents I heard gossiping about this case, almost all expressed a negative attitude toward the woman. They accused her of being flighty for getting to know someone via cell phone, and worried about her future, predicting that she would certainly suffer from going to live so far away from her family. There have also been a few women in recent years that have married men they met in a workplace in South Korea or Germany, and they were the source of gleeful gossip for many days.

On the other hand, people are gradually realizing that this moral principle is losing its validity. The number of women living far away from their familiar mahallas, because they or their husbands are working abroad, has increased significantly since the middle of the 2000s. This is because many people in Saray regard an ideal family as being one in which the wife and children live where their husband/father works. Thus, today, very few families do not have at least one single female family member living abroad. One of my Tajik friends, who is in her thirties, described the following episode. She had been brought up in Saray, and her mother always told her, 'I will not let you set

foot outside this mahalla even after I marry you off'. True to these words, arrangements were made to have her marry a man from the same mahalla where she lived. However, her husband went abroad to study, and found a job in Japan. As a result, she lived away from her parents' home for more than ten years. She felt terrible about this on a daily basis. Then, recently, her nearly seventy-year-old mother crossed the ocean to visit her daughter. Seeing her daughter's stable lifestyle, she said that she accepted her daughter's absence in Saray. 'Nowadays', she prayed in front of her daughter and some guests including me, 'many Tajik people are living far away from their hometowns like this. I should be content. Wherever you go, may God protect you, amen!' The norm that says Muslim women should live their lives as close to their families as possible still constrains people, but more and more people are realizing that there are situations in which those who want to abide by the norms are unable to do so.

The second local norm for Muslim women is discussed next.

(2) Muslim women should do everything they can for their families, and not spend much money on themselves.

From what I was told, almost all the Muslim women who work in town give their earnings to the parents or in-laws who live with them. Properties in a regional town like Saray house two or three generations, and the oldest person usually collects everyone's incomes, and puts them together to manage the household finances. Young brides in particular have practically no right to decide how to spend even their own earnings. One

of my informants, a woman in her forties, handed her entire salary over to her mother-in-law for many years, but when she moved to a neighbouring city for a year, for the sake of her son's education in 2011, she used her salary to pay her and her son's living expenses. Then her mother-in-law became furious, and accused her of being a thief.

However, when one goes to the bazaar nowadays, the material culture of the high-level consumer society is evident. The town bazaar is now overflowing with items for women. Images of beautifully dressed women who consume for their own enjoyment frequently appear on television and in newspapers. That is to say, the pressures of the consumer culture have intensified, so giving up everything for one's family and not consuming anything for oneself is considered extremely difficult.

Some mothers-in-law noticed these changes in younger women. They said that young girls today know everything about housework, about the material culture, and even about sexual matters. When asked, three middle-aged women told me that they married young, knowing almost nothing about any of these matters, and that they lived their lives obeying their mothers-in-law with no minds of their own. They said that they had no reliable sources of information other than older people. Today, young women can obtain information immediately via the Internet, and they already know more than their mothers-in-law. One woman, whose two sons had recently been married, said of her daughters-in-law in 2011: 'They're obedient to my face, but they know much more things than I and may be thinking insulting thoughts. I think I can't completely control them, and that scares me'.

Young women who do not fit into either the first or second norm – who do not fear gossip, and who follow new ways of living – have appeared on the scene. One of the first was Aziza (not her real name), one of my former students in a Japanese class. She studied Japanese eagerly when she was in her teens at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and seized the opportunity for higher education in Japan. After working in Japan following graduation, she married an Uzbek man, and gave birth to a child in Tokyo. At first, she caused a scandal in Saray because her marriage had not been an arranged one and violated the first norm. Some elder women gossiped that she must have been sexually unrestrained in Japan. However, after she held a grand wedding in Saray, and helped her brothers find jobs in Japan, her reputation rightly improved, as people realized that she had greatly helped her family, thereby fulfilling the second norm.

Now, several girls at the Japanese language class in Saray say that they dream of being like Aziza and making use of their language skills, studying, and working abroad. They view her as a successful role model. In 2015, indeed, two girls from the class came to Japan to acquire the qualifications for nursing care. Their goals are obviously to work in Japan.

Another example is Nafisa (not her real name), a woman in her early forties. I had heard about her, and my host family gave me a chance to converse with her over tea, in 2012. According to her story (which was later confirmed by her brother), she entered into an arranged marriage when she was young, but after giving birth to two

children, she divorced her husband on the grounds that their values were incompatible. The mahalla committee tried without success to persuade her to give up the divorce. Since they held that her husband had no particular faults, her brother paid a fine and proceeded with the divorce. She was trained in a specialized health care profession, so after the divorce, she made use of her skills to work in the Middle East for several years. She herself explained that she was working abroad to support her children, but critical rumours about her flew back and forth among the townspeople. One of them was, 'I wonder if she has a new husband over there'.

At the end of her time working abroad, she made a pilgrimage to Mecca, which earned her the honorific title of *haj*, and held a grand feast for her relatives and neighbours, to commemorate the pilgrimage. At this party in 2012, I saw those women who had been critical of her, but they seemed to admire her when they saw her beautifully dressed, and having brought a large number of souvenirs. Even though she has satisfied neither of the two norms, and has been surrounded by gossip, Nafisa seems to be strong enough not to alter her way of life.

In recent years, the advance of global companies has brought increasing pressure in the form of advertisements and magazines to rural towns. These media treat the latest fashions and retail consumption as desirable. Women like Aziza and Nafisa – who live far away from their families, support themselves, and have the economic capacity to provide not only for their families but also for themselves – may become

role models, especially among the younger generation. It is fair to say that the town's local norms for women are being exposed to massive waves of change.

Conclusion

As has been discussed in this article, the emigrant labour that spread throughout Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the first years of the twenty-first century, extending even to the rural areas, changed the landscape of everyday life in the mahallas. The town of Saray's material environment has grown, and people's living standards have risen.

Changes are also evident in the mahalla life-cycle rituals. Although the length of these rituals has been shortened, the phenomenon of being able to purchase services and items for the life-cycle rituals with money, instead of making them by hand or borrowing from neighbours, has steadily made these rituals more expensive. People can save their time and toil by adopting this new trend of outsourcing preparations for rituals, while lessening the mutual assistance of neighbours and its merits. As a result, the social functions of life-cycle rituals to integrate residents are losing their effect, and it is becoming harder for the mahallas to resolve moral hazards of the inhabitants without the coercive power of the government. In addition, the life-cycle rituals have become venues for highlighting income disparities among residents, prompting feelings of economic inequality.

The recent successes of Muslim women who act in place of the men who have gone abroad to work are noteworthy. Muslim women have begun to participate in formerly male-dominated domains, such as mahalla committees, but views about gender roles for housework and child-care have hardly changed at all. Moreover, Muslim women are constrained by local norms that insist 'Muslim women should be like this', and those who violate these norms are likely to be sanctioned by becoming the subjects of gossip. However, the increasing number of women leaving town to work and live together with their migrant husbands, coupled with pressures from the capitalistic material culture to view consumption for oneself as a good thing, has led to a growing awareness that it will be increasingly difficult for Muslim women to be bound by the old local norms. The several Muslim women discussed who were living outside the norms may be new role models for the next generation.

It will require another decade to clarify whether social integration in the mahalla will be recovered or not, and how the norms of Muslim women are redefined in the local context. Russia's economic crisis since 2014 has significantly reduced the number and size of Central Asian migrants' remittances, but their impacts on the mahalla will be the subject of further study.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the mahalla is not an unchangeable and motionless fortress blocking waves of globalization. In fact, the mahalla has been transforming its content and function for centuries, and may be changing henceforth according to the times. For now, emigrants' remittances have caused some damage to

the practice of providing mutual aid, and led to a sense of economic inequality among the mahallas' people. Some local norms for Muslim women, such as being strongly encouraged to live their lives within the town, and to support their families without spending money on themselves, are becoming harder to obey. Dependence on emigrant labour and the associated remittances in Central Asia has significantly affected the lifestyles and morals of mahalla inhabitants.

Notes

1) See he following website for more information about the population of the Valley, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/central-asia-complexities-fergana-valley

2) I was given this information by the statistical bureau of the town.

3) I was given this information by a woman whose daughter was married off in 2003, and whose grandson's wedding was held in to'y xona in 2014.

4) Note, however, that funeral rites cannot be held without the mutual aid of the mahallas' people, since business organizations for these rituals do not yet exist in the town.

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