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Ethnography and Eroticism in Russian Turkestan

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There are only a few studies of the Muslim peripheries of the Russian Empire that apply a gendered lens. This article explores representations of Muslim women in pre-revolutionary Turkestan. It focuses on the research and practices of colonial ethnography, which supplied the authorities with knowledge about locals. Images of Muslim women in the Turkestan Album, a state-sponsored photography project, and French traveler Hugues Krafft's independent volume Through Russian Turkestan, are analyzed and compared to explore how external observers depicted Muslim women. In addition, the article examines how the observers assessed the morality of Muslim women, as well as the impact that male affinities for effeminate young boys (bachas) had on the segregation of women.

Keywords: Gender studies, cultural history, oriental studies, Muslim women, prostitution, bachas, Turkestan.

FROM the second half of the 1860s, the Russian empire continuously absorbed Central Asian spaces. Even though it had yet to complete its military campaigns, the imperial government created the Turkestan General Government in 1867 and began to institutionalize its new possession. The authorities needed knowledge to understand this specific region (*krai*), so the imperial administration commissioned ethnographic projects to study and classify a kaleidoscope of local socio-political and psycho-cultural norms. They tasked employees of the Turkestan Military District (TurkVO) and professional scientists with collecting the information (see Lunin 1962; Lunin 1965; Lunin 1979; Lunin 1990; Geraci and Khodarkovsky 2001; Tolts 2013).

These researchers tried to both discover general information and obtain reliable data on the indigenous population. In particular, they drew

attention to the public and private positions of Muslim women. Officers often depended on the descriptions of their predecessors, or used Muslim men as informants (see Murav'ev 1822; Khanykov 1843; Burslem 1846; Vamberi 1865; Pashino 1868; Nazarov 1968; Demezona and Vitkevicha 1983). For example, officials used their administrative positions to acquire information on locals, inviting Muslim intellectuals to celebrations or gatherings in their homes for unconstrained conversations (Furkat 1961). Travelers arrived from Europe and the USA and, like the official agents, were interested in Muslim women and their role in society and culture (Schuyler 1876; Lansdell 1885; Ross 1899; Kennedy 1890; Meakin 1903; Kemp 1910; Olufsen 1911; Curtis 1911).

In the 1880s, the Nalivkins coauthored an ethnography on Muslim women (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886). In the early 1870s Vladimir Petrovich Nalvkin was a member of several Turkestan campaigns, but soon he resigned due to his political views (socialism) and ethical considerations (rough treatment of the indigenous population). In the 1880s Nalivkin immersed himself in ethnography and decided to devote his life to education, working as a teacher at several institutions in Tashkent (Abashin 2015). His wife, Maria Vladimirovna, who likely knew one of the local languages (Chagatai or Farsi), became the first European woman to study the daily life of Muslim women in Turkestan (Arapov 2015). In addition to detailed anthropological and psychological characteristics of the women, the essay contains an analysis of the chapters (*surahs*) of the Qur'an, which indicate the position of Muslim women in society. The Nalivkin's findings are very different from the articles published both before and after their work. In their essay, Muslim women appear not as unfortunate creatures, but as subjects with certain rights and rational lives.

In addition to ethnographic essays and travelogues, this article uses visual sources: the state-sponsored *Turkestan Album* and *Through Russian Turkestan*, an independent work by the French traveler Hugues Krafft. Increasingly, visual representations of the moral and ethical aspects of life in Turkestan have become an object of study (Abashin 2012; Chernysheva 2015; Yurgeneva 2018; Gorshenina and Sonntag 2018). The works of V. A. Prishchepova are the closest in proximity to this investigation. These works examine deviations in the court behavior of the emirs and khans of Turkestan, but only consider the wealthy classes. (Prishchepova 2007, 223-260; Prishchepova 2011). Yet, as the present article posits, Russians and Europeans reproached not only the "native" elites for their immoral behavior, but the local society itself. In addition, Prishchepova concludes that the deviant behavior of the "natives" was "normalized" by the presence of the Russian government in

Turkestan, and that the October Revolution and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks finally destroyed all deviant behavior. My article proves the opposite: a “policy of non-interference” in the affairs of the indigenous population placed the Russian authorities in an “intermediary position.” (Kotiukova 2016; Morrison 2008; Vasiliev 2018).

Orientalism is inseparable from travelogues and ethnographic sketches of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The extraction of knowledge about the Orient as a form of Western domination was first identified in the famous work by Edward Said (2016). As in the work of Said, the problems of exoticization, eroticization, and feminization of the Orient are important here. The Europeans chose such optics because they understood the Orient as a “space without censorship,” where it was acceptable to disregard formal moral and ethical norms. European men, in particular, desired to penetrate the thick walls of the harem, gain access to the bodies of oriental women, feel the limitless possibility of manipulating them, and experience the whole palette of emotions associated with the sexuality of Muslim women (Alloula 1997). With these stereotypical categories, the Europeans constructed the image of the Orient as “the other,” which needed the help of the West and its rational and utilitarian worldview, society, and culture (Bobrovnikov and Miri 2016; Boetsch and Savarese 1999, 123-144; Sobolev 2013, 39-59).

The purpose of this article is to study pre-revolutionary representations of Muslim women in Turkestan. How did Europeans/Russians learn about and evaluate the visual qualities, character, and morality of Muslim women? What role did ethnographic photography play? With what did Europeans associate the segregation of Muslim women, and how did it correlate with prostitution and homosexuality?

Muslim Women Through the Eyes of European Observers

Representations of Muslim women depended on the aesthetic tastes, education, and cultural and socio-political ideals of the observer. Many Europeans imagined oriental women within the dreamy space of the harem¹ and condemned their husbands as tyrants who undervalued their wives. A Muslim woman was intriguing to a European man, as an object of desire and a sexual fantasy; she was hard to reach and touch but captivating and esteemed (Said 2016).

1. In Turkestan, the rich and powerful kept harems. As the bulk of the population was poor, most Muslims were monogamous.

Turkestan urban Muslim women (Sart women) were presented as beautiful, with dark-skinned faces and a penetrating gaze, passionate and flirtatious (Tageev 1904). It was noted that Sart women were by and large small, with an abundance of feminine curves (Shishov 1904, 106; Minaev 1879). Nomads (Turkmen and Kirghiz), on the contrary, seemed unattractive. When visiting the Turkmen lands, composer Wilhelm Napoleonovich Garteveld admitted that 50 percent of women would do well to veil their faces, “for such faces are rarely found anywhere” (Garteveld 1914, 52). The city was different: upon arriving in Turkestan, ethnographer Dmitry Ivanovich Evarnitsky lamented that on the city streets it was impossible to see the eyes or face of a Muslim woman wrapped in a veil (Evarnitskii 1893, 130; Skrine 1899, 368). This image of the oriental woman was drawn not only from Orientalist literature, but rooted in the prevailing psychological background of the nineteenth century Western world; the concepts of “sex” and “woman” were inseparable, meaning that women were identified based on their sexuality (Abrams 2011).

European opinions about Muslim women’s mental capabilities were condescending and dismissive. For example, many Europeans believed that Muslim women only thought about romance:

... here is the world of the Central Asian desert, on the horizon of which the bright star of a woman’s love shines, a wild love, replacing all feelings, all passions ... a love that we have no idea about. There, a woman in her confinement only lives for love; she ponders it in the long days of loneliness, she cherishes it, she is proud and flaunts it; she knows no worries other than those of the heart. . . (Kovalevskii 1843, 12-13)

According to journalist Yevgeny Lvovich Markov, knowledge about the ancient history of Central Asia, namely about the marriage of Alexander the Great with the Bactrian princess Roxanne, provided the basis for fantasies about the attractiveness of local women (Markov 1901). In addition to historical reminiscences and descriptions of physical appearance, Europeans gave a moral and ethical assessment of oriental women. To some, Muslim women were seen as vindictive, jealous, selfish, and quarrelsome (Khoroshkhin 1876; Lykoshin 1916)

Some observers, however, elevated the moral qualities of Muslim women in Turkestan. Europeans were impressed by Muslim women’s desire to create strong families (Geier 1909). Colonel Vsevolod Vladimirovich Krestovsky, who was an official for special assignments under the Turkestan Governor-General in the Bukhara Khanate and part of the mission of Prince F. Wittgenstein, emphasized that Mus-

lim women were chaste and avoided meeting with Europeans even when completely hidden by the veil. At the same time, there were cases when Krestovsky, walking along the streets of Bukhara, would raise his head to the second floor windows of houses and see Muslim women who did not hide, but allowed themselves to be admired (Krestovskii 1887). A similar event occurred in the Andijan region with the geographer Vladimir Platonovich Voshchinin (Voshchinin 1914).

It was widely believed among Europeans that Muslim women had no rights or freedoms and could do nothing without a man's permission. In reality, everything depended on where they travelled and on who they observed: townspeople, highlanders, or nomads. For example, according to a number of observers, Turkmen women (*tekinki*) enjoyed a degree of independence, could own land and water, and had the right to vote at community gatherings (*maslakhat*) (Abaza 1902; Grodekov 1883; Lomakin 1897).² However, the plight of Muslim women was evident in the disproportionate division of household responsibilities. Women were charged with all the "dirty work," and might also take on the work of harvesting and handicrafts (making carpets or clothing) (Abaza 1902; Alikhanov 1883; Geier 1909). Fatigue and strenuous working conditions affected the health of many women, who reportedly lost their attractiveness and aged prematurely (Pashino 1868).

"Muslim Turkestan" through the Camera Lens

The camera appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century, making it possible to expand the horizons of perception. Photography could create a feeling of closeness or highlight differences between cultures, and was therefore a unique tool that the authorities could use to manipulate public opinion. Since photography made it possible to simplify the process of collecting ethnographic data, it was used for the first time in the Caucasus as a strategy to appropriate the conquered spaces of the Russian Empire. The experiment turned out to be successful, so the imperial administration decided employ it in Central Asia. (Gorshenina and Sonntag 2018). In the early 1870s, the Governor-General commissioned the photo project *Turkestan Album*.

Turkestan Governor-General K. P. von Kaufmann published the album as propaganda in order to visually show the Western powers how

2. Officer A. Lomakin, a connoisseur of Turkmen adat, held the opposite opinion. Having studied the rights and freedoms of Turkmen women, he came to the conclusion that the image of a free and independent woman did not correspond to reality. On the contrary, her reality was quite depressing.

the Russians mastered the Turkestan region (Chernysheva 2015). Another goal of the album was enlightenment, i.e. demonstrating to the elites which peoples and cities the empire possessed and the extent of their wealth. During the Great Reforms (1860s – 1870s), a discussion began among the enlightened Russian public about the oppressed state of women and the need to “emancipate” them like the recently freed peasants (Browder 2003, 41). Consequently, it is possible that one of the functions of the album was to demonstrate the positive influence of Russian power and culture on Muslim women. The compilation of the *Turkestan album* was entrusted to the Russian orientalist Alexander Ludwigovich Kun (Sultonov 2014). Excluding drawings and maps, Kun selected a total of 1,235 photographs and divided them into sections: ethnographic, historical, archaeological, commercial, and technical (Abashin 2012).

As a part of the *Turkestan album*, Kun photographed “natives” for an exhaustive examination of their traditional dress and religious customs (Yurgeneva 2018). The section on ethnography contains 491 photographs, which are divided into two parts. The first part consists mainly of portrait photographs taken in profile and front-facing. Most are arranged in rows of three, with images of men first, followed by women. Along with Muslim women, the album contains photographs of Jewish, Gypsy, and other women pictured in festive outfits. The shots are divided according to ethnicity: first, there are portraits of Kyrgyz, Tajiks, etc. . . (Kun 1871-1872, 3-32).



**Illustration No. 1(Kun 1871-1872, 6)
Images from the Turkestan Album**

In the second part, there are only 4 pictures with Muslim women. The photograph included in the section, “Public Amusements of Central Asians,” portrays a young girl sitting on carpet in traditional clothes. She has an uncovered face and holds a tambourine (*zenbaz*) in her hands, half-turning to look toward the lens (Kun 1871-1872, 4).



Illustration No. 2
Muslim Girl with Zenbaz

All of the photos are staged, which is clear by the artistry of poses, the intentional placement of objects, and the focus of those posing for the camera. Although the photographer suggests that the images were spontaneous, it is not difficult to notice that the models are frozen in uncomfortable positions. The appearance of Muslim women, presented with exposed faces and heads covered with only headscarves or skull-caps, and their placement at home, against the background of a plain, clean wall, emphasizes this artificiality. Towards the end of the first part, there is a snapshot showing the daily clothes (burqa) of urban Muslim women (Kun 1871-1872, 71) without any accompanying explanation.



Illustration No. 3
Everyday dress of urban Muslim women in Turkestan

The Representation of Muslim Women in the *Turkestan Album* and Narrative Sources

There was a stereotype that Muslim women did not appear on the streets with uncovered faces in the cities and villages of Turkestan. In fact, this was an observation made by Europeans in one locality that was applied to the entire territory: the situation, however, was far from homogeneous. Khiva Muslim women wore turbans on their heads, wrapped themselves in thick cloth, and donned leather boots (Abaza 1902, 15). Their outerwear included a shirt and a robe with wide sleeves (*mursek*), and their legs were completely covered with tight-fitting pantaloons. A veil was then thrown over everything. Contrastingly, Tashkent Sart women tied a white scarf (*uramal*) around their heads, covered their faces with an impenetrable mesh (*chimet*), tucked their pants into leather boots (*ichigi*), and wore a shirt and colored caftan (*beshmet*) on top (Khoroshkhin 1876, 113-114). A married Muslim woman could not

appear on the street without a veil, but unmarried women could cover their faces with muslin (a cotton fabric) (Geier 1909, 18).

In mountainous areas, a woman could walk around the village without covering her face, so as not to impede one's movement (Shishov 1910). Nomads did not wear a burqa and their clothes did not differ from men's (Kostenko, 1870). Kyrgyz women wore a long shirt, wide trousers, a long-sleeved robe, boots, and a white scarf over their heads (Smirnov 1914). Muslim Turkmen women of the Trans-Caspian region also did not wear veils. The Turkmen woman's costume consisted of a multi-colored shirt and pantaloons, a woolen robe, and a scarf or a skullcap (Alikhanov 1883). Hairstyle was an important feature in the photographs, especially those showing Uzbek and Tajik women. The number of braids indicated the woman's status (single or married): if there were five of them (*besch kakul*), she was single, and if there were two (*dzhuan*), she was married (Khoroshkhin 1876, 114). In most of the photos, the women have five or more braids. For example, the Uzbek woman Makhtab-ai and the Tajik woman Mahsat-ai both have their hair parted and styled into more than five braids and are wearing skullcaps (Kun 1871-1872).



Illustration No. 4
Uzbek woman Makhtab-ai and Tajik woman Mahsat-ai

It appears that the women in the photographs are around twenty years old, so it is likely they were married, despite their hairstyle. In Turkestan marriage took place between the ages of twelve and fif-

teen, however there were also cases of younger girls being married off (Kushelevsky, 1891). Most likely, the uncharacteristic hairstyle and “emancipated” representation of the women in the photographs reflect the requirements of the photographer. It remains a mystery how the women agreed to pose in such a way, i.e. how were the “models” selected for the shooting? Was there an agreement with their husbands? Notably, the models’ social origins were also unknown. Perhaps these are the daughters of Muslims who closely cooperated with the imperial administration and were thus relatively Russified (Gramenitskiy 1896, 48).

Photography and Prostitution

In addition to the *Turkestan Album*, this paper relies on *Through Russian Turkestan*, a work compiled by the French traveler Hugues Krafft in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast to the Album, the photographs taken by Krafft were accompanied by the author’s comments. Krafft also photographed residents of different ages alongside monuments and cityscapes. In one illustration in the section “*Habitations et mœurs*” (“Dwellings and manners”), we find a group of Muslim women dressed in burqas walking to the bazaar (Krafft 1902, 105). And on the next page, a staged photo of a girl standing against a wall holding a little boy, possibly her brother. In the photographs, both are dressed modestly in everyday clothing (Krafft 1902, 106). In Krafft’s photographs, the girls’ faces are not covered because children could be unveiled.

Just as Kun did, Krafft, in the section “*Types et costumes*” (“Types and Costumes”), included many staged shots of Muslim women. As in the 1870s, Krafft surprisingly managed to persuade women to be photographed. He attributed his success to finding prostitutes willing to pose (Krafft 1902). At first, he attempted to take pictures of Muslim women in Bukhara but failed and concluded that there were either no courtesans in Bukhara, or that they were kept secret (Krafft 1902). Krafft was almost correct, there was both open (*jalap*) and undercover (*kupiya*) prostitution in Turkestan, the latter of which would have only been known to a chosen circle of officials, merchants, and clergy (Nalivkin 1886). These men invited secret or “elite” prostitutes over to dance, please the men, and provide pleasant company (Nalivkin 1886, 243). Krafft was unable to pinpoint the ethnicity of the women he photographed, but it is likely that they were Uzbeks, Tajiks, or Turkmen. Mongoloid women were not pictured.



Illustration No. 5
A Female Child

In order to differentiate Turkestan prostitutes, Krafft left a description of their outfits, which differed from the clothing of “decent” Muslim women. Prostitutes wore European clothes in combination with local ones: jackets, tunics, loose dresses, and robes. In addition, their outfits were made of expensive materials and embroidered with velvet or silk (Krafft 1902, 150).

The hairstyles that Krafft describes are similar to those in the *Turkestan Album*. Long hair was parted in the middle, braided into many thin braids, within which silver jewelry was woven (Krafft 1902, 150). On their heads, courtesans wore a diadem, in which they inserted feathers and from which they hung silver and turquoise pendants. According to Krafft, courtesans also wore jewelry inlaid with precious stones and silver necklaces interspersed with corals and seashells. They also looked after their toilette, buying incense and perfume (1902, 150).



Illustration No. 6
Photograph of a Turkestan prostitute



Illustration No. 7
Clothing and Jewelry of Turkestan Courtesans

It is safe to assume that A.L. Kuhn resorted to a similar method of selecting “models,” contacting prostitutes and negotiating payment with the women themselves or brothel owners. Krafft and Kuhn also photographed Jewish women. Regarding Jewish women, Krafft clarified that he worked not with prostitutes, but with “decent women,” who he photographed only after receiving permission from their husbands, who were interested in obtaining copies of the photographs themselves (Krafft 1902, 154). It is possible that Kuhn also received permission from the husbands of Jewish women.

Turkestan was not only an attractive travel destination for European ethnographers. In the early 1870s the American diplomat and explorer Eugene Schuyler visited the region. Schuyler was a member of the American and Russian Geographical Society, and he left behind a two-volume work devoted to the Turkestan region based on his observations and communication with settlers, indigenous people, and officials (Schuyler 1876). Schuyler, like other travelers, focused on the appearance of Muslim women. He noted that most appeared on the streets of Tashkent in a burqa, but that one could encounter Muslim women with bare faces. In a similar vein, the Nalivkins also reported uncovered Muslim women, who protested against outdated moral rules. To the Nalivkins this protest “...was something in between a curse directed at her past... and a celebration of freedom” (Nalivkin 1886, 238).

Society considered those “freed” from the veil to be prostitutes, but in reality, this was unlikely. Often, women abandoned the veil in order to leave unwanted husbands. To do this, a Muslim woman feigned sickness and went to a Russian hospital, where, in the 1870s, the staff consisted of Christian men (Schuyler 1876, 124). The Christian man’s supposed unhindered access to the Muslim woman’s body was perceived as a violation of bodily and mental purity, and an invasion of the woman’s intimate space. Visiting a Russian hospital could also convey a Muslim woman’s lack of respect for her husband. By overstepping both ethical and religious boundaries, she humiliated her husband, made him feel useless, and destroyed his self-confidence. Such transgressions often led to divorce. These divorced Muslim women calmly appeared on the streets of Tashkent without a veil and drove around the city in phaetons (Schuyler 1876, 124).

Wearing a veil was a measure of morality for a Muslim woman. Covering one’s body ensured its safety and indicated loyalty to only one man. Conservative clothing was associated with piety and intended to shield women from their “vulgar” nature. Thus, Muslim men perceived the *chadra* as a way for Muslim women to adhere to the traditional social order (Northrop 2004, 44). Interestingly, Schuyler and Krafft noted that

Tartar and Jewish women voluntarily put on a veil when going outside (Krafft 1902, 158; Schuyler 1876, 124). Veil wearing among non-Muslims can be seen as an adaptation to the local culture; many Tatars and Jews adopted this norm to conceal their ethnic origins and avoid conflict, since local Muslims treated them with contempt. Not only did Turkestan Tatar and Jewish women begin to imitate local custom, but Christian women in Syria also left the house covered with a veil (Amin 1912, 3).

The Thorns of Vice of Turkestan Society

Russian and European observers not only described the exoticism of Turkestan, but condemned its “native” societal vices. Many reproached Muslim husbands for their indifference to their wives (Shishov 1904, 404). According to Europeans, this happened for several reasons. Firstly, long-standing oriental traditions, which expected Muslim parents to choose their sons’ wives, ruled out marital choice. Secondly, a lack of communication between partners before marriage desacralized the wedding bond and thus diminished the importance of family. This lack of prior acquaintance complicated everyday life because it was impossible for spouses to know the other’s character. And finally, the disproportionate division of labor after marriage, in which the woman did all the household chores, led to strife. Women, they argued, realizing their “utilitarian” role, stopped caring for themselves. Sex, too, served either the satisfaction of momentary desires or procreation, which was itself dictated by tradition and controlled by relatives and community members.

Commonplace in the descriptions of Turkestan were complaints about legal discrimination, tyranny against Muslim women, and male indifference towards women’s needs in the family, all of which Europeans considered anachronistic. According to a local saying, “a woman is like a cow,” i.e. she is of a small mind and risks making a man obtuse, if he spends a lot of time with her (Ostroumov 1896, 66). Among nomads, proverbs humiliating women were common: “Hope better for a dog than for a wife who can betray you,” or “A woman’s hair is long, her mind is short” (Katanov 1893, 8).

From these clichés, European observers concluded that men, estranged from family life, looked for other forms of emotional release, which led to immoral acts. Urban Muslim men knew where to find prostitutes, but they were considered expensive entertainment. Therefore, same-sex relationships were widely practiced with effeminate young boys (*bachas*) from poor families who were specially trained to perform erotic dances (Shishov 1904, 331). Unlike in the case of pros-

titutes, clubs paid for the services of bachas making them affordable for poor men. In the harems of the Central Asian rulers, the bachas lived as concubines for Bukhara emirs and *beks* (dignitaries) (Olufsen 1911). Notably, while condemning local sexual practices, Russians and Europeans nevertheless described them with enthusiasm. Their compositions are full of detailed information and photographs of bachas.



Illustration No. 8
Turkestan Album: juvenile bacha

Among their descriptions, Europeans reported how the owners of the dancing boys (*bachebaza*) helped their wards by paying for their studies. In return, bachas were invited to a teahouse or home where orgies were held (Dobromyslov 1912; Ostroumov 1896) and sometimes taken on pleasure trips. By evening, the parties usually ended in gang rape.³

3. This is the phrase used by N. Ostroumov

Jealousy over coveted bachas sometimes led to murders (Ostroumov 1896). A bacha's beauty was noted until about 25-30 years old, after which he became either a bachebaza himself, or a criminal involved in petty theft or robbery (Ostroumov 1896).

Usually, bachas sang or demonstrated erotic dances in the streets, a custom that did not disturb locals. British traveler Henry Lansdell reported a scenario where three men played tambourines while boys danced to the music on streets of Kitab (Lansdell 1885). Bacha dances and songs were not only a means of entertainment, but were also part of theatrical performances; the boys changed into women's clothes with many small bells on their arms and legs (Kostenko 1871, 77), and adult bachas wore long hair and red attire (Lansdell 1885, 33). This choice of color was not accidental, as red symbolizes eroticism, physical pleasure, passion, and femininity in many cultures (Pasturo 2019).



Illustration No. 9
Through Russian Turkestan: Adult Bacha

The bacha dance consisted of rolling on bare feet, small jumps, and waving hand movements. Faced with the onlooker's gaze, the bacha "made eyes," rolling them upwards in an expression of bliss, straightened his long curls, flirted, and sent air kisses towards the beholder (Krestovskii 1887, 175-6). After the dance, the bacha was invited to *dastarkhan*, where he was given a sip of tea from his own bowl to make him feel more at ease (Kostenko 1871, 78). Bachas were treated and addressed with respect. Travelers reported sayings such as "Your Majesty," "Your slave listens," (Schuyler 1876, 133) and "Let the pains of your misfortune strike me" (Arandarenko 1889, 7). In Turkestan one could find female dancers, but they were kept secret and seldom advertised, since women's erotic dancing was considered a contemptible and taboo form of entertainment (Schuyler 1876, 137). Arguably, local attitudes and perceptions of women, sexuality, and marriage all contributed to the popularity of bachas, overturning "correct" modes of sexual behavior in favor of "deviant" ones.

Bacha dances had names, for example, "Afghani," "Shirazi," "Kashgari," which reflected the stories of same-sex love that took place in different countries or cities (Schuyler 1876, 134). Bachas had their own songs for each type of client and often caricatured them according to their particular traits: fat and bald, rich or poor. Each boy was known by his name, to which was added his status "bacha:" Mirza Hamdam Hajibacha or Seid-bacha. Erotic meaning and romantic passion permeate the essence of the songs. Ethnographer Abubakir Akhmetzhanovich Divaev (1855-1933) recorded and translated several such songs:

Now, in a dance we set off down a charming path for friends
 We sacrifice our goals and our souls for each other
 While dancing, cast off your grief and sorrow
 Be kind, take a look and appreciate the expression of Hamdam's eyes
 And another tenderness
 And a different pose (Komarov 1910, 203-219).

Or:

I look at my lover, what is his goal
 Copulation with me will heal your sorrows
 My black eyebrows are a craving for the soul
 To the amorous crowds, I am the source of only one misfortune
 And another tenderness
 And a different pose (Komarov 1910, 203-219).

European observers claimed the spread of sexually transmitted diseases was an obvious consequence of prostitution and homosexuality (Kushelevskii 1891). Islam, like any monotheistic religion, does not accept prostitution, for which severe punishments are imposed. Moreover, heterosexual relationships in Islamic culture are sanctified, while homosexuality is treated as a crime (Lev-Starovich 1991; Ostroumov 1900). Despite this, homosexuality and pedophilia in Turkestan did not cause open discontent. At the same time, homosexuality led to even greater oppression of women. According to Shishov, Muslim women considered homosexuality to be a vile phenomenon, given that bachas were attracted to men more than young girls (Shishov 1904).

Administrative Tolerance, or “Ignoring” Cultural and Moral “Deviations”?

American traveler and journalist William Curtis characterized the attitude of the Russian authorities towards Turkestani traditions, customs, and ways of life as tolerant (Curtis 1911). For a long time, the Russian administration did not interfere in the intimate lives of the “natives,” as it was the clergy’s obligation to watch over Muslims’ moral character. Furthermore, no sanctions were applied to brothels, since prostitution in Russia was legalized in 1843 (Dobromyslov 1912; Malysheva 2010).⁴ Indeed, in Tashkent, the city administration, the police, and the *rais* (moral observers) protected prostitutes from clients who used their services and did not pay (Dobromyslov 1912, 325). When women reported these occurrences to the police, they immediately took action (Dobromyslov 1912, 325).

Pleasure houses provided work for Muslim women in the region. European observers found several reasons why these women became prostitutes (Lykoshin 1916). Often, women turned to prostitution in order to become fiscally independent from men or to overcome fa-

4. Then, on the initiative of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Count Lev Alekseevich Perovsky, a supervisory body for “public women” was created: the Medical and Police Committee. Immediately after the occupation of Tashkent, the Russian administration began to register prostitutes. In 1876, 100 prostitutes were registered in Tashkent, of which 80 were local Muslim women and 20 were Russian women. A medical examination was carried out once a week. In Turkestan, supervision of prostitutes was assigned to the police and the city doctor.

miliar poverty; to live lavish lifestyles that the domestic space did not provide; or to avoid becoming a second or third wife (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886, 235–236.). Remarkably, according to General Georgy Alekseevich Arandarenko (1846–1908), in urban areas, husbands allowed their wives to engage in prostitution to support their families (Arandarenko 1889; Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886).⁵ It was possible to sell a woman to a brothel by legalizing the case with a judge (*Kaziy*) (Arandarenko 1889).⁶ Urban Muslims (Sarts) maintained most of the brothels, often allowing no more than four prostitutes, according to the maximum number of legal wives (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886). Extensive erotic literature authored by local Muslims about heterosexual and same-sex love also existed (Babadjanov 2010).

The authorities were also aware that in addition to husbands selling wives, parents sold their young sons as bachas in order to earn a living (Arandarenko 1889). Although homosexuality and pedophilia were criminal offenses in the Russian Empire, those who “kept” bachas were not responsible before the law. The Russian government even weakened its regulation over lower-level administrators, allowing the People’s Court (*Mehkeme*) to determine sentences for sodomy. According to the orientalist and local imperial official, Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin, the People’s Court was known for issuing more lenient sentences than the Russian secular court (Lykoshin 1916).

Both male and female prostitution contaminated the image of Russian authority. In Tashkent, brothels, taverns, and baths were raided. After their arrests, the prostitutes were sorted into locals and visitors. Locals received “yellow tickets,” while visitors were sent back to their native lands. These actions were ineffective, as the number of courtesans quickly replenished. In 1910, 24 brothels were discovered in Tashkent (Dobromyslov 1912, 342–3).

Moreover, it was not until 1884 that the city mayor, Colonel Stepan Romanovich Putintsev, attempted to suppress bacha practices in the “old” (Muslim) part of Tashkent. Putintsev asked the opinion of Muslim jurists (*fakikhs*), who condemned the phenom-

5. According to V. P. Nalivkin’s memoirs about the annexation of the Kokand possessions, after the Russian occupation of the right bank of the Syr Darya (Namangan district) in 1875, local men began to bring their wives to the Russian detachments as prostitutes.

6. On the relaxation of Muslim morals and the sale of wives see: Mikhaylov 1900.

enon as unlawful (Ostroumov 1896, 69-71). No measures were taken, however. In 1890 the head of Tashkent asked for the opinion of the judges (*Kazies*)⁷ on the problem of bacha ownership and banned dancing in teahouses (Lykoshin 1916; 358). The law came into force, but in 1896 it was revoked, and bacha dances were introduced into charity festival programs (Lykoshin 1916; 358).⁸ Bachas even performed in the open at the Turkestan agricultural, industrial, and scientific exhibition of 1909, held in Tashkent (Komarov, Il’kina, and Divaev 1910).

Storytellers (*Bakhshi*) sang love songs about bachas. A common theme was the khan’s love for an indifferent bacha. Tormented by an unrequited emotion, he invited the bacha home and performed consoling elegies. Muslim men, listening to such lyrics, sobbed until the verses described the softening of the youth’s temper and his growing sympathy for the sovereign (Kostenko 1870, 78-9). Bachas were also portrayed in the visual arts and folk poetry. As an “oriental exotic” they certainly attracted the attention of painters. The Russian painter Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin depicted a Muslim woman wrapped in a veil and a bacha (Schimmelpenninck 2009; 179-209). The tradition of admiring bacha dances survived the October Revolution and the Bolshevik rise to power, as evidenced by a verse called “Turkestan” published in the educational collection of the Turkestan People’s University (TNU):

... Where is the fanatical priest of the Prophet
 Half-dozing, at this late hour
 Calls the sons of the Orient to the mosque
 Make your usual prayer
 Where is that lazy Sart
 He hurries under the shadow of elm
 Where a voluptuous cocotte,
 The feminine bacha is dancing. (“Sbornik Turkestarskogo Narodnogo
 Universiteta” 1918, 169).

7. Sometimes rendered as Qadi.

8. Perhaps the authorities did not have enough funds for an administrative event, so they had to take a step back. Bachebas were wealthy people, and Muslim men enjoyed watching bachas dance. Apparently, to attract attention and interest among the population, the authorities went for a more tolerant approach.

Conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian Turkestan attracted travelers and researchers. Wishing to learn more about Russia's new possessions, ethnographers and orientalists began to study the "indigenous" peoples, including women. They tried to describe the Muslim woman as accurately and clearly as possible, giving rise to eroticized and exoticized narratives. While reporting the traditions and customs of local society, observers, many of whom were ruled by their own prejudices about the Orient and Muslim women, gleaned from "Orientalist" literature, tried to capture her visual, moral, and spiritual characteristics.

Furthermore, photography, invented in the nineteenth century, served as a vehicle of propaganda for the authorities. Thanks to this new technology, K.P. von Kaufman and A.L. Kun provided a glimpse into the lives of Turkestan Muslim women: how they looked and dressed, what they did, and how they entertained themselves. The depiction of women in the *Turkestan Album* is not "objective," but rather a romanticized representation created by the imperial administration to impress the international arena and the Russian public. Although schematic and simple, the album illustrates the diversity of the region and its people.

Krafft's work, *Through Russian Turkestan*, was intended to be the opposite of the *Turkestan Album*. Krafft relied on attracting daughters of Russified Muslims or prostitutes, since parents and relatives had little control over them. Although many courtesans entered into a marriage (*nikah* according to Sharia), this was but an illusion to protect the brothel. Wearing the veil (*burqa*) was not widespread either, rather it depended on environmental conditions as well as cultural and social norms. Some urban Muslim women voluntarily gave up the *burqa* without becoming prostitutes, although in the eyes of most believers they were automatically considered as such. In general, conservatism was deeply rooted in the minds of ordinary people and the "native" aristocracy.

Eroticism and exoticism — an integral part of travel stories and essays — appear immediately when authors describe a Muslim woman. However, to a greater extent in the narratives there are depictions of brazen young *bachas* rather than attractive women. Feminine boys were considered an important part of the daily lives of many Muslim men who had lost interest in family life and wives whom they did not choose. Despite the condemnation of homosexuality and pedophilia

in Islam and in the laws of the Russian Empire, local society tolerated both. Bacha dances were commonplace in public spaces, while the erotic dances of young women were hidden from society. Narrative and visual representations constructed the orientalist image and flavor of Turkestan society with a ubiquitous sense of lust and hedonism, where even men were feminized.

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