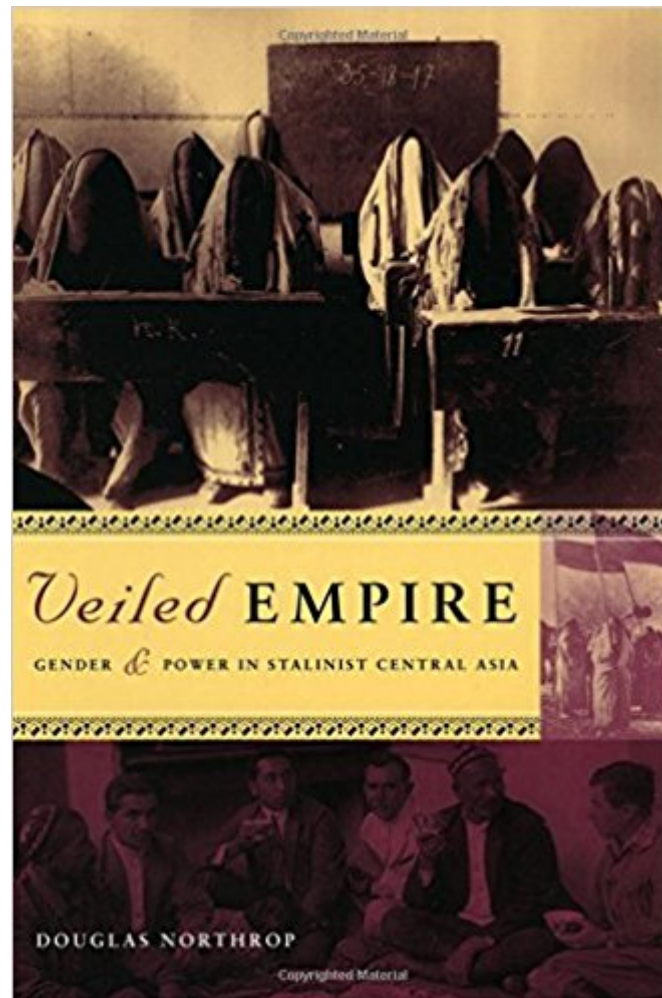




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Veiled Empire: Gender And Power In Stalinist Central Asia



Synopsis

Drawing on extensive research in the archives of Russia and Uzbekistan, Douglas Northrop here reconstructs the turbulent history of a Soviet campaign that sought to end the seclusion of Muslim women. In Uzbekistan it focused above all on a massive effort to eliminate the heavy horsehair-and-cotton veils worn by many women and girls. This campaign against the veil was, in Northrop's view, emblematic of the larger Soviet attempt to bring the proletarian revolution to Muslim Central Asia, a region Bolsheviks saw as primitive and backward. The Soviets focused on women and the family in an effort to forge a new, "liberated" social order. This unveiling campaign, however, took place in the context of a half-century of Russian colonization and the long-standing suspicion of rural Muslim peasants toward an urban, colonial state. Widespread resistance to the idea of unveiling quickly appeared and developed into a broader anti-Soviet animosity among Uzbeks of both sexes. Over the next quarter-century a bitter and often violent confrontation ensued, with battles being waged over indigenous practices of veiling and seclusion. New local and national identities coalesced around these very practices that had been placed under attack. Veils became powerful anticolonial symbols for the Uzbek nation as well as important markers of Muslim propriety. Bolshevik leaders, who had seen this campaign as an excellent way to enlist allies while proving their own European credentials as enlightened reformers, thus inadvertently strengthened the seclusion of Uzbek women—precisely the reverse of what they set out to do. Northrop's fascinating and evocative book shows both the fluidity of Central Asian cultural practices and the real limits that existed on Stalinist authority, even during the ostensibly totalitarian 1930s.

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Customer Reviews

"Few doubt that Central Asia labors under a Soviet legacy, but precisely what that legacy is remains elusive. Northrop goes a long way toward reconstructing a key piece of it: the history of the Bolsheviks' effort to uproot the old and impose the new on the Muslim population of Uzbekistan between 1917 and 1941." — *Foreign Affairs* "Northrop shows how, in the Soviet case, there simply was not enough modernization for modernity. The din of factory machinery, sirens and barking loudspeakers, which Soviet artists celebrated in the 1920s, did not reach the quiet, dusty streets of Uzbekistan. . . . Northrop finds a colonial empire obscuring imperialist policies under the cloak of decolonization." — *Times Literary Supplement* "Veiled Empire contributes a lot to a more proper understanding of Soviet power in practice. It provides a remarkably deep insight into the inherent dynamics of Soviet power and gender relations in Uzbekistan during the first two decades of its existence." — *Nationalities Papers* "Veiled Empire displays a thorough familiarity with the newly opened Russian and Uzbek-language archives, theoretical sophistication, historiographic erudition, and attention to everyday life. It offers the mold-breaking analysis of cultural change in Central Asia. . . . It is an important book for those interested in Central Asia and Soviet imperialism, and in the clash of modernity and tradition, especially over gender. As Northrop reminds us, the veil has remained a potent point of contestation between secular states and Muslim cultures . . . and he provides a detailed, compelling, and thoughtful analysis of the hujum in what should become the authoritative work on the subject." — *Journal of The Historical Society* "Veiled Empire takes, as its central subject, an article of clothing: the head-to-toe covering worn by Uzbek women. . . . Douglas Northrop traces the multivalent meanings attached to this garment from various vantage points, including Bolshevik activists in both the center and the periphery, veiled and unveiled Uzbek women, Uzbek men, and the Muslim clerical establishment. . . . Northrop's book is among the most sophisticated contributions to a growing body of literature rooted in the non-Russian areas of the USSR." — *Canadian Journal of History* "Veiled Empire is a tour de force of research, based as it is on a thorough and pioneering search of Moscow and Uzbek archives. Douglas Northrop's proficiency in languages and vast knowledge of several different historiographies make this a stunning achievement." — *Lynne Viola, University of Toronto* "In *Veiled Empire*, Douglas Northrop masterfully analyzes a wealth of archival information from Uzbekistan, made accessible after the collapse of the USSR, on arguably one of Stalin's most celebrated revolutionary campaigns in Central Asia. *Veiled Empire* is a path-breaking and highly sophisticated work that carefully unpacks the events surrounding what came to be a highly symbolic piece of female clothing, to explore much deeper contestations over power and identities and to

demonstrate the limits of Soviet power as well as the pull of changing loyalties through time. It is a most welcome addition to the growing body of literature on the analytical history of Soviet rule in post-independence Uzbekistan." — Nazif Shahrani, Indiana University

Douglas Northrop is Professor of History at the University of Michigan.

IN good conditions!

Regardless of Soviet propaganda to the contrary, it is revealing to see how difficult it is to change traditions regarding a woman's place in a culture.

GREAT BOOK!!! A MUST READ!!

This wonderful insightful and original study tells the story of Communism and its relation with regressive Islamic attitudes in Central Asia, especially towards women. This tells the story of Communism's tentative strides towards making its Central Asian empire one of equality while at the same time trying to encourage ethnic individualism. Communism had railed against the Tsar's empire, thus when it came into contact with the Steppe peoples of Central Asia, mostly of ethnic Mongolian stock who had recently been converted to Islam and where women were required to wear long heavy veils (as evidenced by the wonderful photo on the cover and within). The Communists had a two track approach. On the one hand they continued their ethnic encouragements to create separate republics out of the tribal material. Yet at the same time Communists opened schools for women, enrolled girls for the first time, taught women to read, and within a short time had even trained the first Uzbek female patrooper. These successes were coupled with 'veil burning' events where women would be protected by tough honorable communist youth as they burned the symbols of their oppression. But this sparked protest, ethnic and religious. The author weaves a wonderful story, the book is full of replete moral equivalency, so the Russians who are liberators of women are also seen as 'imperialists' somehow suppressing a culture, but if one reads between the lines they will see that the pictures alone show the truth of Communism's crusade to bring equal rights to Asia. The process has reversed itself today, but for a short time in the 1920s idealism triumphed and women could walk down the street with their hair flowing proudly behind them, no longer confined to anonymity behind a Burka. A must read for anyone, Seth J. Frantzman

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