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**Nancy Rosenberger. Seeking food rights: Nation, inequality and repression in Uzbekistan. Case studies on contemporary social issues. John A. Young, (Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. 2012.**

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**Nancy Rosenberger. *Seeking food rights: Nation, inequality and repression in Uzbekistan. Case studies on contemporary social issues.* John A. Young, (Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012.**

Although this work has an interesting title and premise, it might be better considered a collection of articles rather than a scholarly monograph. Its author, Nancy Rosenberger, is a full professor at the University of Oregon. Her prior research has been on Japan; however, in this text, she seems to have expanded the scope of her studies to include Central Asia, as she lived in Tajikistan for at least two months during the 2011-12 school year in addition to the time she spent in Uzbekistan as a result of the Fulbright scholarship she received to do this research. This work adds to a corpus of article-length works that address food security in the region. In her preface, Rosenberger indicates that she intends this to be a text for beginners, “to introduce readers” to the region, to give “readers practice in thinking through the meaning of food rights in a certain time and place” and to note “channels for considering power differences that exist within a nation” (pp. vii-viii). The text consists of nine chapters, not all of which fit well with the book’s stated topic. Rosenberger has divided her study into sections which perhaps could have intersected more than they do: urban environments, with “class differences”; rural areas, here the Ferghana Valley; women; and ethnicity. Three of her chapters (the second, on Uzbek history; the seventh, on the Andijan uprising and suppression in 2005; and the eighth on food security in the author’s local area in Oregon) fit less well into the book’s concept. For Central Asian studies, only the chapter on the Andijan uprising is particularly significant.

Rosenberger’s research was apparently profoundly affected by her being in-country during the Andijan uprising in 2005. While the subtitle of the text includes the words “inequality and repression in Uzbekistan,” Rosenberger’s work includes little authentic political analysis. An explicit discussion of the Karimov regime and the backdrop against which issues of food insecurity were examined might have made a better article, but unfortunately, Rosenberger’s research contained minimal analysis and was instead only colored (by her own admission) by political rumor and generalization (p. 135). While some of Rosenberger’s criticism of the government is not unfounded, it failed to help her achieve a true understanding of the people of Uzbekistan. Her analysis is largely self-centered, and as such, her understanding of food distribution is limited. Most disappointing, perhaps, is Rosenberger’s underestimation of the role of individual agency among the Uzbek people. In short, in her analysis of food insecurity and distribution in Uzbekistan, Rosenberger fails to grasp the significance of four major factors: (1) the role of family networks in food distribution; (2) the range of meanings of an ethnic identity in Central Asia; (3) interpretations of “tradition” as performance; and (4) religion.

First, the author notes but fails to consider seriously the role of family networks in food distribution. For example, in her presentation of the city of Tashkent, which she notes is less food-poor than the rest of the country (given that it interacts with its suburbs and with the rest of the country), she fails to consider many of the networks and pathways along which food actually travels: Students and others with Tashkent residency permits often bring food into the city and send money or goods back to their families in Tashkent. Family members who do not reside in Tashkent often visit and stay with family for weeks or months. These familial networks also function in the other direction, as Tashkenters also often send their children out to more rural areas for the summer or to find a healthier atmosphere in which to live, typically with relatives outside of the city; likewise, gifts and support flow out of Tashkent to other parts of the country on the occasions of weddings and other life rituals. Family dynamics often involve food, with

visitors trying to establish ties by bringing substantial gifts. All of these are normal family interactions, the significance of which vis-à-vis food distribution Rosenberger failed to perceive, either because she was not looking—Tashkenters were taking her to family in the Ferghana Valley, so the networks were being utilized for her benefit—or because her isolation from the everyday life of families precluded it. For instance, from my own personal familial experience, an uncle from Bukhara, when visiting my family in Tashkent, would regularly bring meat and bread from his home and would often do what amounted to a week's worth of food shopping when he arrived. His visits always meant extraordinary treats. These experiences are not reflected in Rosenberger's description of the "food security" paradigm, which seems to be based on a nuclear family model rather than the extended kinship networks that are more common in Uzbekistan. Her assumptions based on middle-class American life are manifest when talking about families in Uzbekistan, who, she asserts "stick together" "because they have no choice" (p. 45) or when observing that younger "relatives *had* to [provide] the primary caring [*sic.*]" for elderly parents (p. 62, emphasis added), not considering that Uzbek children may, in fact, want to provide such care. These general failures to see beyond her own cultural perspective also meant that Rosenberger was apparently unaware of the role that even guests typically play in providing staples; I can only imagine how the economically disadvantaged family she visited in Tashkent felt when she brought, apparently, little more than tea (pp. 42-45). Descriptions of these extended kinship networks could have been integrated in Rosenberger's tacked-on chapter covering Oregon, where networks may also be observed, in this case a network of exclusion (p. 158).

In addition to her failure to cite family networks as integral to food distribution, she also only minimally grasped issues of ethnicity and identity. Indeed, for a scholar of Uzbekistan, the presentation of ethnicity and identity are naïve at best. Rosenberger seems to have known little about the region's history; her chapter on Uzbekistan's history is a catch bag of summaries of excellent works on the history of the early Soviet period, such as those by Doug Northrop and Marianne Kamp, along with some lesser-known articles and a few, altogether unknown to this historian, for which there are citations in the text without references in the bibliography (pp. 29-30). Her conception of ethnicity is never explicitly stated. She seems unaware of the depth and richness of the integration or intermingling of Central Asian ethnic identities, an integration one may readily find in Central Asian works spanning hundreds of years and in sophisticated discussions of Central Asian identity readily available in English-language scholarly publications. Although she mentions the fact that identities have been structured around regions (p. 27)—as a result of being from Samarqand or Bukhara, for instance—she does not seem to have considered the reality that people of varying language groups or economic statuses in the same region might share more similarities than differences. One might even suggest that this work is more in line with nineteenth-century ideas of anthropological research than the twenty-first; her description of a "Tajik" face (p. 118) as "narrower . . . with more chiseled features" might have come from nineteenth-century travel literature.

Not only did Rosenberger miss the boat with respect to family networks and issues of ethnic identity, so too did she stumble in her attempt to deconstruct the role of tradition. Despite her assertion that she is a "modern" anthropologist (pp. 108-9), the author seems oblivious to her own construction of "traditional" customs and foods in Uzbekistan. For example, her suggestion that "palov" (a spelling that I have never seen during my years in Uzbekistan for the word "pilow," "plov," "pilaf," or "pilav"—for the traditional dish *pilaf*) came from somewhere else (pp. 6, 121) and is, therefore, somehow not "local," when it has been a regional staple for at the very least hundreds of years (longer than North America has been populated by Europeans) may make it difficult for her beginner readers to differentiate her thinking from the "primordial"

constructions to which she objects. In one particular example, her focus on the “traditional”—for instance, the tradition of taking a bite of bread for a departing family member and saving the loaf until the person’s return (p. 10)—ignores the many citizens of Uzbekistan who might consider such a “tradition” no longer relevant, not being “contemporary,” (“*sovremennii*” in Russian) or “modern” (“*zamonavi*” in Uzbek) and therefore not bother with it. Such an oversight betrays Rosenberger’s most amateur of anthropology mistakes: conflating “tradition” with “old fashioned” (i.e. *traditional*). As such, she fails to appreciate the possibility of “modern tradition” or of city-dwelling citizens capably performing tradition. The reader is left with the impression that Rosenberger believes that cosmopolitan citizens of Uzbekistan are “less authentic” than their rural counterparts and that their use of alcohol or their multiethnic, transnational outlooks are somehow less representative of “tradition” than the behaviors or attitudes of their village-dwelling cousins (pp. 46-48). Nor does she seem to have considered (even more surprisingly given her anthropological background) the possibility that her hosts might have been performing “tradition” for the foreign professor.

The last of Rosenberger’s shortcomings has to do with her limited understanding of the role of religion in Uzbekistan and many of the basic tenets of Islam itself. Although a discussion of religion is a basic element in her examination of the government’s repression of its population, Rosenberger’s understanding of Islam and how to describe it in an academic setting is weak. She repeats Islamophobic notions like “Islam can act as a center of power that could compete with his [Karimov’s] government” (p. 25). She does not seem to understand even basic terms such as “imam,” which she translated as “Islamic priest” (pp. 91, 96, 148) when a more accurate definition might range from the leader of *salat*, the five-times-a-day prayer, to a government-sanctioned religious leader, depending on context. She says that President Islam Karimov is “Islamic” rather than “Muslim” (p. 25); she calls the Friday midday prayer “Sabbath in Islam” (p. 100), when the term “Sabbath” is not, in fact, a term invoked in Islam, which has no religiously constructed “day of rest”. She is not clear about the differences between Sunnis and Shi’a (p. 141) and seems to think that men “bare their souls” during Friday midday services (p. 148), which is no more likely to happen during the Friday *salat* than any of the other 34 prayers of the week, and might even be less likely, given that public displays are generally considered unseemly. She mentions “veils” (p. 28) and “conservative Islamic beliefs” (p. 84, 88, 92) without indicating what these terms mean in this context since there are multiple ways of wearing headscarves in Uzbekistan, and even an expert on religion among Uzbeks could only guess what beliefs or clothing these words were intended to represent. Finally, the part food plays in Islamic charity was apparently surprising to her (p. 74) despite extensive literature on the topic.

Thus, while food security needs study in Central Asia, sadly, this book’s utility is largely as a window into what it was like for an American in Uzbekistan during the Andijan uprising. Nonetheless, the abundant quotes from research subjects and plentiful photographs will engage readers. In a classroom lead by someone with experience in the region, the book would likely provide a platform for discussion. The presentation of Koreans and multi-generational interactions of women are useful in a beginning text. However, professors will want to consider how the problems with family, identity, “tradition”, and religion might be ameliorated before using the book in the classroom.