

Laura Olso Osterman

CHA Request: Gender Performance in Public and Private Celebrations of Navruz in
Contemporary Uzbekistan, March 2023

I would like to request partial funding for a research trip to Uzbekistan, March 7-30, 2023. The trip is to perform ethnographic participant observation for the holiday Navruz. Navruz is a New Year's celebration, known as the Persian New Year, celebrated around 21 March (today, it is celebrated in Uzbekistan most of the month of March). In Soviet Uzbekistan, the government banned the celebration of Navruz from the 1930s to the 1960s, since it was understood as a Muslim holiday. It was allowed again after Soviet ethnographers established that the holiday actually had pre-Islamic origins. In the 1980s, Navruz was again prohibited on the grounds that it involved Islamic worship. Once Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, Navruz was reinstated and gained the status of an official national holiday. It has now dual purposes and functions: it supports nation-building with public mass spectacle (including theatrical and music and dance performances), and is also a grassroots holiday which men and women celebrate in somewhat separate spheres. During this holiday, in the Fergana valley men perform *askiya*, in which they try to best each other by reciting their own humorous satirical verses (like rap battles) in tea houses; elsewhere, they perform *kurash*, ritualized wrestling, in local clubs, and in Samarkand, they take part in the sport of *buzkashi*, horse polo. Meanwhile, throughout Uzbekistan women are engaged in home rituals of preparing elaborate meals, including the dish *sumalak*, and storytelling.

During my trip in 2023, I plan to research the distinctions between public and private rituals, and between men's and women's gendered ritual celebrations of this holiday. For part of

my time there I will be joining a group trip organized by [study abroad provider SRAS](#), which will guide participants to public celebrations of Navruz, including *kurash* (wrestling), *buzkashi* (horse polo), and performances of music and dance. Afterwards, folklorist Olim Qayumov, of Alisher Navo'i Tashkent State University, a specialist in Shamanic ritual folklore, has offered to bring me with him to the Fergana valley to observe the *askiya* (poetry and laughter) ritual. I hope also to have occasion to observe women's in-home celebrations (including on the SRAS-organized program), and to that end will be making contact with two other contacts, a scholar of music, Roza Hodjayeveva, and a non-scholar (former resident of Denver), to schedule informal meetings and hopefully be invited to a home-based celebration. I also plan to consult with Professor Hodjayeveva regarding the types of music and dance I observe. Planned outcome is an article on "Gender Performance in Public and Private Celebrations of Navruz in Contemporary Uzbekistan," for a journal such as *Asian Folklore Studies*, *Folklorica*, or *Asian Anthropology*.

My familiarity with the culture: I studied Uzbek language and culture for three years in graduate school (Indiana University and Columbia University, late 1980s-1990s), but have never traveled to Central Asia (in those days, few universities were hiring Central Asian experts, so I changed my career path to more Russia-centric work). However, I have been very interested in the Muslim cultures of the post-Communist space. I recently completed a book on contemporary folk culture and religious practice among the Pomaks, a minority Muslim population in Bulgaria, including one chapter on revival of public and private holidays. Uzbekistan would be a new area for fieldwork for me, as currently and for the foreseeable future (possibly for the rest of my career), fieldwork in Russia is off-limits. Currently there is a general trend among US scholars towards the decolonization of our field (formerly Russian Studies, now Russian, East European

and Eurasian Studies); partly, this process entails increased scholarly attention to the histories and cultures of the former Soviet republics.

Budget:

SRAS program fee: hotel, meals, local transportation to Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand, and guides March 10-23 (see invoice; this price comes out to \$194 per day*): \$2524

Airfare: Turkish Airlines, March 7-30: \$1858 (itinerary attached) (NOTE: the same itinerary from Christopherson, included, yielded a higher price of \$2404, so I bought directly from Turkish Airlines; I chose an itinerary with 1 day in Istanbul to avoid a second overnight flight to Tashkent; the ticket I purchased was still less expensive than Christopherson price of \$1985 for flying direct with the second overnight flight)

Hotel Tashkonak Istanbul, March 8-10 (Booking.com): \$137

Hotel Human Tashkent, March 23-30 (Booking.com): \$517

Meals March 23-30 approximately \$40 per day* = \$280

Transportation Local: \$50

(*Note, US Government per diem for Uzbekistan/ Tashkent from 1/1/2023 is \$163/night lodging and \$122 meals and incidentals; I am not requesting this per diem)

TOTAL: \$5366

Current funding:

As of 11/14/22 I had the following in my accounts:

11002382 -- OSTERMAN RESEARCH & AWARDS (ACTIVE) \$1742

11010758 -- \$XQK-OLSON (ACTIVE) \$1392

I plan to spend most of these funds on this trip, leaving \$720 in the account to pay for my research assistant (I am book review editor for a journal, so she helps with this as well as bibliographic work, etc.) for approximately 3 hours per week at \$16/hr till the end of spring semester 2023 = \$2414

Total trip costs \$5366

Minus funds in Osterman accounts \$2414

Total \$2952

Requested from ASFE (1/31/22): \$1476

Requested from CHA: \$1476