

Findings

These are the results of the complex expert review by specialists who were assembled to conduct the review and who are recognized as experts on criminal activity: specialists on religion - S. Sharipov and O. Shkovorodiuk; leading specialists from the Center of Propaganda and Spirituality - G. Narzullaev and A. Akmalov; psychologists R. Khikmatulaeva and R. Rasuleva. The review was organized by the Department of Criminal Investigation in the Public Prosecutor's Office in the City of Tashkent. O.Kh. Musayev, August 5, 2009.

The film “The Burden of Virginity” by Umida Akhmedova and Oleg Karpov was produced by the studio “NONAME” and was filmed with support from the Embassy of Switzerland in Uzbekistan in 2008.

The film “The Burden of Virginity” is composed of two parts and was produced with support from the Swiss Embassy. The examination of “*Chimildik*” is a well-known part of our ancient traditions. When a young couple gets married, evidence of the young woman’s virginity is demanded before her wedding. However, a young woman who plays sports, exercises incorrectly, or has an inherently flexible hymen is not able to defend her honor. In such cases, the young woman is taken to a medical institution in order to prove through scientific means whether or not she is still a virgin. This subject is raised in the film, but the problem is exaggerated. The film humiliates the honor of our women and our national dignity. Under the guise of showing our ceremonies, the authors of the documentary accuse us of backwardness. Our “*Chimildik*” ceremony appears uncultured and uncivilized to the Western world. A quote from the film states, “Every woman is the mistress of her own body, neither her husband, nor her mother-in-law, nor her daughter-in-law has the right to be involved in her private affairs.” This is the position of the film. We are an emotional people, so of course every young woman cries when she leaves her parents’ house; she is leaving behind her parents’ home forever, and she is obliged to live far away from her loved ones. However, this need to cry does not exist in the West. When people in the West watch these scenes, they think that the poor girl has been forced to marry. In our culture, mothers are too timid to speak with their daughters about the problems between men and women. For this reason there has always been the “*Yanga*,” who serves as an intermediary, yet the film criticizes the fact that mothers do not speak about such lewd themes.

In the film, a male doctor shamelessly depicts sexual intercourse. Showing this on film is a foreign concept to our people.

Before leaving her father’s house before her wedding, one bride takes off all of her clothing right down to her underwear. Was it really necessary to show this? An Imam from a regional mosque (this is evident from his appearance) presents this scenario: say a Muslim woman who is born on a Friday is named Odina, Oisha, or Fatima. In Farsi, the name Odina means “Friday.” And say this girl, who was born on a Friday, has a flexible hymen. Therefore, when the girl gets married and it is discovered that she is not a virgin, it is necessary to take into consideration that she was born on a Friday. Then every seventh woman should have a flexible hymen, but statistics do not support this.

The film contains scenes that are not at all relevant to the subject of the film. These scenes have another purpose. It is as if they were filmed especially to show remote villages with squalid buildings. We understood the overall idea of the film to be "In Uzbekistan the rights of women have been violated." This idea, which the film attempts to underscore, is flawed. On the basis of all this, we do not believe that this film fits with our morals or the morals of other countries.

In the film "The Burden of Virginity," several people (who seem to be professionals, but who are not officially identified) talk about virginity, but who they are, where they obtained their information, on what basis they are interested in this subject all remain uncertain. The film begins with a quote, "All events and people in the film are fictitious. Any resemblance to real people and their lives is complete coincidence." Does this mean that the people who narrate the film are also imaginary, and if so, then what is the purpose of the film, and what were the motives of authors before its creation?

In the second half of the film, a woman (who is not identified) talks about virginity, saying: "Does a woman have a right to her own body? Does her body and her hair belong to her or does her body belong to someone else?," "And this, this tiny coating between her legs, to whom does it belong?," "A young woman's virginity is doubted, and she is subjected to an examination by a medical expert. The girl writes that the examination hurt her and that since that time – over the past eight years - she cannot be satisfied by her husband because on her first night as a married woman, she was subjected to a medical examination....and it was discovered that she was still a virgin. Here she writes a letter to Uktam Mukhammad Murod, a medical doctor, asking if there are other less-painful methods to verify virginity...here he gives examples and writes that they can be used even now...what does this mean...one or two women are invited to boil an egg, preferably a dove's egg or a small chicken egg, clean this egg well, and push it into a woman's place. If the egg goes in easily it means that the woman is not a virgin. If it does not go in or goes in with difficulty it means that she is still a virgin."

Information that is provided in such a way, like teenage slang, will be easier to accept than information presented in an academic manner. Such absurd, baseless, and improper commentary insults the traditions of the peoples of Uzbekistan in such a way that it can be seen as slander, disparaging and disrespectful of national traditions. Using this didactic technique, the authors indoctrinate minors, pursuing the exclusive goal of undermining a healthy lifestyle and also violating all scientifically-grounded pedagogical and psychological methods for preparing the next generation for adulthood.

Our Republic has extensive services for professional psychological consultations in the homes of young married couples. Having such a questionable film, which endeavors to undermine our spiritual and moral values, is not necessary in Uzbekistan. For traditional religions, the chastity of a person before and after marriage is based on his health – the health of his body, soul, and spirit. Any doctrine advocating the teaching of free sexual relations is in opposition to a healthy way of living for both the individual and for society as a whole.

“The Burden of Virginity” does not conform with the demands of ideology because national traditions and the culture and customs of the peoples living in Uzbekistan are not taken into consideration. This film promotes a serious distortion of the next generation’s perception of values. The film is also psychological and may have a destructive influence on the development of teenagers and young people. Distribution of this film will greatly damage the spiritual values of Uzbekistan.

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The photo album “Women and Men: From Dawn to Dusk” (Gender Program of the Embassy of Switzerland in Uzbekistan), Tashkent – 2007.

Produced with the support of the Swiss Embassy’s Gender Program, the album “Women and Men: From Sunrise to Sunset” contains 111 photographs by Umida Akhmedova. The introduction to the book was written by historian Nodira Azimova. Azimova examines the photos in the album from the point of view of gender. Likewise, she discusses the national ceremony of the Uzbeks and Tajiks called “*kelin-salom*.” In her opinion, the bride who is entering a new family must submit to all of her new family members: from the family patriarch down to the smallest child. It is essential that the bride submits to the patriarchal structure of her new family. Our respected customs and our great values, which all young women dream about and which the bride fulfills with pride – this is the wonderful ceremony of “*kelin-salom*.” To evaluate our ceremonies in relation to gender does not make sense. However, the authors present many such ideas in the introduction to the album. Ninety percent of the photographs in the album were taken in remote, backward villages, and the author’s aim is to show the difficult nature of life.



In particular, (pg. 19) the crying girl, covering her face with her hands.



(pg. 23) the young woman and a grazing donkey,



(pg. 25) the face smeared with flour or some other substance,



(pg. 29) carrying a basin of straw on her head,



(pg. 44) the girl sweeping the roof,





It is astonishing to see the outdated conditions of villages reflected on these pages (pgs. 24, 46, 47, 51, 106, 107, 114, 119). Umida Akhmedova depicts our national rites "*Nikokh*" [the marriage ceremony in the bride's house] and "*Sunnat-tui*" [circumcision] in a negative light.



The example (pg. 40) of the crying young woman saying goodbye to her father reflects the daughter's desire for a blessing.



(pg. 41) The hands of a nervous bride, next to her – the groom's clenched fist. At first glance both photographs seem normal, but through these two photographs the photographer wants to convey that the young woman who is getting married has completely lost her freedom and is crying as she says goodbye to her father. In Europe, brides do not cry when they get married because they do not have these feelings. Any Westerner who sees these photographs will think that young women in Uzbekistan are forced to marry and that is why they cry.

The photographer is critical of circumcision. The four photographs on circumcision follow one after another.



At first, the young boy who is to be circumcised is standing (pg. 68),



Then they give him money (pg. 69),



Next, the half-naked, crying boy clings to his father (pgs. 70, 71). This is a very cruel sight. Through these pictures, the photographer wishes to arouse pity for the boy by demonstrating that Uzbek people are barbarians.

It is interesting that the photographer loves to take pictures of women sweeping. It is as if cleaning is the only profession in our city. Umida Akhmedova's lens does not capture beautiful places, modern buildings, or prosperous villages.



This person sees the woman in the telephone booth waiting for clients (pg. 85).



A woman sells carpets with a wet head (pg. 86),



A flower seller, who looks pensively into the lens.



Also, the photographer sees the street bum, who fell asleep on the monument. (pgs. 88, 89)



The sleeping raisin seller (pg. 100),



The old beggar woman (pg. 101) – the photographer takes photos of these sorts of scenes. The photographs in the album are presented in a definitive succession – childhood, adolescence, youth, and old age.



When one leafs through this album, one begins to wonder why people come into this world when only suffering, difficulty, and sorrow exist (pgs. 115, 118). This is indeed the goal of the photographer. She attempts, albeit artificially, to show the gender problems in Uzbekistan.









In the photographs of women (pgs. 23, 29, 32, 44, 45, 46, 63, 74, 79, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 93, 101, 108, 115, 117), the women are only occupied with everyday concerns and difficult work.



While the men (pgs. 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 68) are mostly occupied with wrestling, cock fighting, eating plov, and entertainment. The album does not say where the photos were taken.



One begins to wonder if these photos were taken in Uzbekistan or in Afghanistan (pgs. 104, 105). Something that is most interesting is that “Tashkent 2007” is written on the first page of the album, but on the other side of the page “Print-S, city of Almaty” is written. This means that it is possible that the photos may have been taken in different places. Additionally, Umida Akhmedova’s biography, which is in the album, states that she participated in a photo exhibit in Tbilisi.



Knowing this, on pages (96, 97, 98, 99, 103) in the album the photographs resemble places in Georgia. This is especially true when one sees the photo of the old woman holding flowers in front of the pay phone with an inscription in Georgian.



Opening the album, we see the reflection of a woman coloring her hair and holding a camera, and we assume that this is the photographer. Usually women do not allow strangers to see these sorts of scenes. Here we see a tasteless woman with heaps of clothing and bags in the background, and it ruins the onlooker's mood. A pessimistic mood reigns throughout the photo album. Life is not shown to be very beautiful in this collection of photographs. A foreigner who has never been to Uzbekistan, but who is familiar with this album, will conclude that this is a country where people live in the Middle Ages. The photographer purposefully underscores the difficulty of life, and especially attempts to show our women as victims.



Even the picture taken in one of our capital's squares is of a woman with a downcast head. Umida Akhmedova's entire album is done for her own ends. The author shows the relationships between men and women, and the problems of gender in general, inadequately. The photo album does not conform to aesthetic demands. In summary, it is essential to stop this album's distribution among the broader public.

The following quotations are from the annotated sections of the album "Women and Men: From Dawn to Dusk" (the description was written by Nodira Azimova, a historian and representative of the sociological center "*Shark va Tavsia*"):

"The album provides persuasive evidence of the renaissance of Islam and local traditions."

“It is for this reason that we do not choose the road, but the road chooses us. The photograph of the children in the clay pots – *tandir*- is symbolic. The patriarchal and traditional relations in the family force young boys and girls into unequal gender roles, which they struggle out of, only to break the *tandir*. “

“A young woman must start her life with her husband in accordance with conditions that were dictated many generations ago. Ceremonies and customs, in which gender roles are inevitably contained, were detailed and prescribed centuries ago and direct women and men back to the sources of patriarchy.

«The *yanga* acquaints the bride with each member of her new family, and forces the bride to submit to each new relative.”

This sort of information can influence the rising generation’s perception of the validity of the spiritual and moral values of Uzbekistan. The visual nature of the book exerts significant psychological influence over young people. The quality of the album’s publication predisposes young people to adopting its ideas about the moral principles of our people and the basic condition of our national ideology.

Signatures of the experts: R. Rasulev, R. Khikmatullaev (University TGPU “Nizami”); Specialists from the Committee on Religion: S. Sharipov, O. Shkovorodiuk; Specialist from the Center “*Manaviyat Markazi*” (Spiritual Center): Z. Gafarov; Specialists from the Center of Education and Spirituality: G. Narzullaev, A. Akmalov

Translation prepared from the Russian translation (by Aleksei Volosevich) of the Uzbek original.

Documentary Film by Umida Akhmedova and Oleg Karpov is available here:

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7331823776116544493#> (Part 1)

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7331823776116544493&hl=ru#docid=-8593512391182015746> (Part 2)