The Women's Emancipation Movement in Kyrgyzstan: The Work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930

By

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Abstract

When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 as a result of the October Revolution, and when their government expanded over Central Asia during the first decade of the Soviet Union, women's emancipation was one of the main projects that the state undertook. In Central Asia, this was especially the case, for the Soviets tried to transform and modernize the society, and one of the central means to achieve that goal was the emancipation of women in the region. In Kyrgyzstan, along with the Communist Party and other governmental organizations, the Zhenotdel or Women's Department played a crucial role in implementing the new legislation and trying to advance the whole emancipation project. This thesis, based on archival research, aims at uncovering the work and experiences of the women of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of biographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, refences, appendices, etc.): 22,825 words

Entire manuscript: 25, 868 words

Signed: _____ (Azamat Askar)

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To the women who raised me: my grandma, my mom and my aunt.

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Introduction

Growing up in post-Soviet Kazakhstan at the end of the 1990s, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, made me realize and see many things, and this is even more so now, when I can look back and reflect on the past. The 1990s have been hard for most people: politically, socially, and above all – economically. In those hard times, especially so in my family but also in hundreds of other families I have known, it was the women who carried the burdens and problems of the society on their shoulders.

Ever since then, one question has continued to bother me: why are the work and heroism of women left unnoticed and uncelebrated? Why do people not write about how millions of women have pulled all their families during the most difficult times all through the region of Central Asia? It is because of these questions that I have made it my goal to study and write about women's hard work in the past and present of Central Asia. They truly are *unsung heroes*.

While I continued my academic journey in the anthropology and history of Central Asia, one other thing I realized was that not recognizing the hard work done by women was an issue not only of the 1990s in Central Asia, nor was it only about the 20th century, it was a major tendency in history. This is why I decided to write this thesis which uncovers and studies the tremendous contribution made by women in early-20th-century Kyrgyz history.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 as a result of the October Revolution, and when their government expanded over Central Asia during the first decade of the Soviet Union, women's emancipation was one of the main projects that the state undertook. In Central Asia, this was especially the case, for the Soviets tried to transform and modernize the society, and one of the central means to achieve that goal was the emancipation of women in the region. In Central

Asia, along with the Communist Party and other governmental organizations, the Zhenotdel or Women's Department played a crucial role in implementing the new legislation and trying to advance the whole emancipation project. This thesis, based on archival research, aims at uncovering the work and experiences of the women of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930 (the period decided by the availability of sources). In other words, this thesis will attempt to address such questions as: what were the ways in which the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan conducted its work in the country? What was the relationship between the Zhenotdel and the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan? What were the work dynamics and hierarchies within the Zhenotdel in the years from 1924 to 1930?

In order to be able to address the questions posed above, the thesis will proceed in the following manner: In **Chapter 1**, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks I will use in my thesis, my methodology and limitations. I will be discussing the *top-down* or *totalitarian* approach in the study of Soviet history and the subsequent *revisionist* approach. Furthermore, I will discuss Edward Said's Orientalism and how all these theories can be applied to study the history of Soviet Central Asia. Additionally, I will write about my research methodology, that is, archival research and content-analysis of the archival documents. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of my research and research methodology.

In **Chapter 2**, my literature review, I will analyze major scholarly publications on the topic of the history and gender ideology of the Soviet Union as well as the early Soviet (gender) politics in Central Asia. Finally, I will discuss my own research and what I aim to be researching based on the gaps in the literature.

In **Chapter 3,** I will examine the ways in which the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan conducted its work from 1924 to 1930, based on an analysis of archival materials. This chapter will also

examine the ways in which the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan differed from the work conducted in mainland Russia.

In **Chapter 4,** I will discuss the relationship of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other governmental organizations, asking whether they had negative or positive interactions and about the power hierarchies in play. Additionally, I will explore the work dynamics within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. Finally, I will discuss whether and how the archival documents about the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel show traces of what we now, following Edward Said, understand as forms of Orientalism. Finally, in the thesis **Conclusion**, I will reiterate my main questions and findings, and also ideas for further research on the topic.

Chapter One – Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that I use to analyze primary sources, that is, to explore and examine the archival documents regarding the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. Moreover, the chapter will discuss the methodology I have used in order to carry out my fieldwork and research. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the methodology.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

During the Cold War, Western historiography of Soviet history, starting from the October Revolution of 1917, used *a totalitarian* or, *top-down* approach. Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, in her "Revisionism in Soviet History" article, discusses the *top-down* approach used in Soviet historiography and the *revisionism* that followed in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] According to Fitzpatrick, the Western "traditional Sovietology" "portrayed the Soviet Union as a completely top-down entity. The destruction of autonomous associations and the atomization of bonds between people produced a powerless, passive society that was purely an object of regime control and manipulation. The main mechanism of control was terror, with propaganda used as a mobilizing device in second place."[2] In other words, Western scholarship produced a specific, monolithic image of the Soviet Union, in which the party or the state was the only power and authority, guided by their communist and Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the people were mere recipients of that ideology. The *top-down* or *totalitarian* approach was so dominant that it was the only paradigm in

[1] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 79.
[2] Sheila Fitzpatrick, 80.

the West regarding the history of the Soviet Union. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, a "paradigm shift" occurred in Soviet historiography when young Western political scientists and historians started reconsidering the dominant approach to studying the Soviet history. This is when the "revisionist" approach developed, which led to new scholarship and new knowledge. Lynne Viola, similar to Fitzpatrick, also writes about revisionism: "The parentheses was called revisionism: a positive appellation in the relatively open 1970s when new thinking characterized most of the history profession irrespective of national subject and a generation of American (and other) scholars pioneered new approaches to historical thinking on the Revolution, Civil War, and NEP years."[3] In other words, new approaches enabled the scholars to produce nuanced knowledge, different from the *totalitarian* portrayal of Soviet history. Revisionists aimed to look at the Soviet history from a *bottom-up* perspective as opposed to the *top-down* or *totalitarian* approach used by the Western scholars in the field of *traditional Sovietology*. Therefore, the history of the Soviet Union, including the events of the Bolsheviks' October Revolution of 1917, underwent a serious reexamination, in which the Bolsheviks or the Communist Party was no longer viewed as a monolithic, totalitarian and top-down entity. Furthermore, the revisionist no longer viewed the people of the Soviet Union as atomized objects of the regime governed by terror and ideology.

The revisionist approach is crucially important to my research. In order to study the history of the women's emancipation movement in Soviet Union, in my case – Central Asia, it is important to view women as active participants of that movement. My study of the women's emancipation movement in Kyrgyzstan aims to uncover the contribution of the Zhenotdel, and other women in earlier years of the Soviet power in Central Asia and their active participation in both the process of women's emancipation and the building of the Soviet Union. Put differently, the Bolsheviks

[3] Lynne Viola, "The Cold War in American Soviet Historiography and the End of the Soviet Union," *Russian Review* 61, no. 1 (January 2002): 25.

were not a monolithic entity that bestowed liberty, and women were not just passive receivers of that freedom. Therefore my research mainly focuses on analyzing archival documents that can shed light on the work and activism of local women in Kyrgyzstan in the years from 1924 to 1930 of Soviet socialism.

I will also be using a somewhat similar approach to historian Marianne Kamp, pioneering 2006 scholarly work in the field of Central Asian women's history. *The new woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, modernity, and unveiling under communism*, Kamp brilliantly combines several research methods and primary sources, that is, along with archival documents, Kamp also conducts interviews with women, and explores magazines and other publications of that time.[4] I would argue that Kamp's approach is distinctive, if considered within the context of Central Asian historiography. Above all, Kamp's research subjects are not the state or the Party, but the Uzbek women themselves. The reason I favor this particular approach is that it does not focus only on a single actor, be that the government, or the Communist Party, or the ideology, rather the women of Central Asia, who took part in women's emancipation movement and of the building of the Soviet Union. In other words, Kamp's approach represents a deliberate and successful departure from the *top-down* or *totalitarian* approach. To Kamp, and to my own research, women are thus not perceived as objects of Bolshevik emancipation, but are rather as active agents of change.

Additionally, I will be applying Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism*, especially in my Chapter 4, which discusses the power hierarchies and work dynamics within the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan. Edward Said, in his groundbreaking book of 1978, defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and

[4] Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Jackson School Publications in International Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

(most of the time) the Occident."[5] Although Said mostly discusses Western Orientalism - mainly British and French - the Russian Empire had its own type of Orientalism as well, especially towards the "people of the East." An historian Adeeb Khalid, in his 2006 article titled "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective" writes, "[b]oth the Soviet and the Kemalist states had at their disposal the baggage, common to modern European thought, of evolution, of backwardness and progress, of ethnic classification of peoples, and, indeed, of orientalism."[6] By comparing two modernizing and transformational projects launched in the 20th century, the Bolshevik's Soviet project in Central Asia on the one hand and the post-Ottoman Kemalist Turkey on the other, Adeeb Khalid demonstrates how the early Bolsheviks were using the "baggage of orientalist knowledge" to civilize and modernize the people of Central Asia. Alternatively stated, the early Soviet leadership, using the knowledge and stereotypes inherited from tsarist Russia (influenced by European colonialism and orientalism), was reiterating the oriental portrayal of the Soviet East, which included the Central Asian region as well. In my research, however, I will be applying the theory of Orientalism to specifically highlight the power hierarchies and work dynamics within the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan, where there were both *Evropeiki* (European/Russian/ non-local) and *Muszhenschiny* (Muslim women). In other words, I will attempt to show the ways in which the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan was influenced by the oriental image of the Central Asian region. Through conducting content analysis of the archival documents of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930, I will try to demonstrate to what extent a portrayal of Central Asia as the "East" or "Eastern" permeated the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan.

[5] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York : Vintage Books, 1979), 2.
[6] Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (ed 2006): 251, https://doi.org/10.2307/4148591.

1.2 Research Methodology

For my research, I will explore and analyze archival documents from the Central State Archive of Social-Political Documents of the Kyrgyz Republic (further CSA-KR). I conducted a three-months long fieldtrip to Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic and surveyed numerous different archival documents from the period from 1924 to 1930.

After I had developed my research questions and plan, I went to the archives of the Kyrgyz Republic to conduct my research. The information on the official website of the archive and the online catalogue is limited, therefore, I did not know what documents would be available.

Upon starting my archival research, I scanned the archive catalogue and requested from the staff all documents that, in one way or another, related to the work of the Department for Work Among Women or Department for Work Among Peasant and Working Women (*Otdel po rabote sredi zhenshchin; otdel po rabote sredi dekhanok i krestyanok; Zhenotdel* – it was named differently in different documents). Consequently, I was handed 25 *delos* from the 10th Fond which contain the documents of Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Soviet Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks from 1924 to 1937. The documents I have looked at are particularly from the 2nd *Opis* of 10th Fond of CSA-KR.[7] There were, in total, 3,179 *listy* (pages) of documents that varied greatly, namely: directives, circulars, briefs, protocols, stenographs, reports, telegrams, letters, orders and so on. After having briefly read through all of the documents, I requested scanned copies of the 147 documents that I found most relevant to my research. This material contained information pertaining the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. I then created an Excel spread sheet where I divided the information into several categories, such as: the *Delo* number, the starting date of that particular *Delo*, the end date of that *Delo*, the amount of the documents each

[7] "Opis" can be translated from Russian as *inventory* or *list of*; It is the second level of categorizing archival documents, after *Fond*. *Delo*, translated as *case*, refers to a specific folder which contains the documents.

Delo contained, numerical data of each single document, type of the document, title of the document, date on the document, who was the document written by, who was the document addressed to, what were the topics discussed in it, the names of the people mentioned in the document, locations mentioned in it, a short summary of the information in the document, and, finally, my own comments regarding the content, style, and language of the documents, especially if it were work-related/personal letters of the workers of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. In total, I used 16 categories to sort the information. Classifying the documents by date, subject, or geographic location, etc. enabled me to see what kind of work the Zhenotdel members in Kyrgyzstan had carried out and where. It also let me see what kind of problems they faced and why. Above everything else, it allowed me to see and trace women's activism in different places at different times in Kyrgyzstan.

In my methodology of researching archival documents, I do not only treat archives as a "storage" of historical documents, but also as entities that reflect the time and space when the archive was established and the documents stored. Antoinette Burton, in her *Archive stories: facts, fictions, and the writing of history*, writes, "For archives do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretative applications. Though their own origins are often occluded and the exclusion on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures – pressures which leave traces and which render archives themselves artifacts of history."[8] Applying this methodological framework to my research, I will examine not only the contents of the archival documents I have gathered, but will also explore the information about those documents at a *meta* level. In other words, I will address

[8] Antoinette M. Burton, *Archive Stories : Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

questions such as what can we infer from the fact that the archives had a specific *Delo*s dedicated to the work of the Women's Department, but not a separate *Opis*? Why did the archivists start gathering documents only from the year of 1924 and not earlier, for example in 1919 when the Women's Department started its work? What can one tell from the fact that most of the documents are filed under the section of Communist Party documents?

Moreover, Antoinette Burton argues that "all archives are provisional, interested, and calcified in both deliberate and unintentional ways; that all archives are, in the end, fundamentally unreliable."[9] Obviously, this does not mean that one cannot use archives for research purposes, but rather, one needs to try to navigate through these documents and to unpack them while taking their contexts into consideration. Historian John Arnold in his 2000 book *History: A Very Short Introduction* writes, "Archives, then, are not simply storehouses. They are systematized repositories of information, cared for and nurtured by professionals."[10] In other words, archives and the documents that those archives have are never to be taken at face value; they should be analyzed within the political, social, and spatiotemporal discourse of their time. This is what I have tried to do in my own research, that is, finding and uncovering archival documents concerning the work of the Women's Department in Kyrgyzstan during the initial decades of the Bolshevik government. As Malgorzata Fidelis in her "Recovering Women's Voices in Poland" chapter writes: "As I began my research, I expected to find women's stories about the difficulties of everyday life in the context of political repressions and endemic material shortages. Instead, I found complex and lively characters who actively shaped their identities through interaction with state institutions. By carefully reading letters and listening to women's stories, I discovered not

[9] Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Contesting Archives : Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2010), 4.
[10] John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 60.

only the richness and diversity of women's experiences, but also the complex relationship between individuals and a totalitarian state."[11] Moreover, she writes that "the letters and the interviews point to women *as active historical subjects rather than passive recipients of communist messages and policies.*"[12] Although what Malgorzata Fidelis is writing about is about post-World War Two Poland, and my research is about the Central Asian context after the Bolsheviks came to power, nevertheless, this is the approach I use in my research, that is, through archival documents, I aim to uncover women's active participation in everyday life and politics, as well as how they were understanding and shaping those politics.

1.3 Limitations of the research

Although I have gone through a few thousand archival documents and have analyzed closely 147 of them, that is, conducted a content-analysis oriented close reading, there are a lot of questions that I will not be able to address. *First of all*, the documents that I have analyzed start only in January of 1924, meaning that the five previous years since the establishment of the Women's Department, or the Zhenotdel, in 1919, are not covered in my research. The missing piece in the history of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia from 1919 until 1924 can be, to some extent, traced through other scholarly works (detailed in my Chapter 2), however, since those 5 years are formative in the history of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, this is a big gap for my research. *Second*, there is only limited information available about the archive itself, that is, when was it first established and where. Who were the first archivists and how and why did they decide to collect and save those documents we have today and chose them over other documents (I assume there were much more)? Were the documents lost in the course of time? *Third*, inside each archival *Delo*

[11] Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, *Contesting Archives*, 109.
[12] Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, 109.

which I requested, there were the dates and signatures (sometimes names as well, but often not) of the people who accessed these documents during the existence of the archive: as early as the 1950s and as late as the 1990s and 2000s. Some of the *Delo*s have been accessed several times, some just once. Who were the people who accessed these particular materials (concerning the work of the Women's Department)? All of this information is not in my research, either. *Fourth*, the documents that they have been moved from one *Delo* to another, or from one *Opis* to another, quite often. Evidence for that are the sequential numbers on each pages that are crossed out and new ones assigned. Which of the *Delo* contained what documents prior to my research and why? Why were almost all of the documents shuffled and moved around from one place to another? What could we learn from tracing the original locations of the documents and their movement (which simply seems impossible now)?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical framework that I apply in my thesis, and the methodology I have used to carry out my research. Moreover, the chapter concluded with the discussion of some limitations of my research and methodology.

In section 1.1 of this chapter, I have discussed the theories I applied in my research. I explored the *totalitarian* and *top-down* approach used to study the history of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. That is, how so-called *traditional Sovietology* in western scholarship was permeated by the discourse of the Cold War, in which the Soviet Union and its history from the October Revolution onwards was portrayed as a monolithic and top-down entity. In other words, the Soviet Union was described as a monolith and its people as being driven by ideology and terror. Moreover, I have discussed the *revisionist* approach in Soviet history as described by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Lynne Viola. Furthermore, I have explored Marianne Kamp's approach, which I

use in my research as well, for I claim that Kamp's approach is one of the pioneering frameworks particularly in the study of the women's emancipation and activism in Central Asia during the first decade of the Bolshevik power in Central Asia. Finally, I have engaged with Edward Said's Orientalism, for I use that theoretical framework when I discuss the Orientalism in the Soviet Union and how it can be studied from the archival document of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

In section 1.2 I have described the methodology I used to conduct my research, that is, archival research and content-analysis oriented close examination of the archival documents I have chosen for my research. I engage with the works of Antoinette Burton, John Arnold and Nupur Chaudhuri et al., that is, how archives are never just a storehouse of the historical primary sources, but rather are, in and of itself, research objects. Finally, I have examined the work of Malgorzata Fidelis, in which she uncovers the experiences of women in Communist Poland. This is what I aim to do in my research as well, that is, uncovering the work of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan and the experiences of the members of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

Finally, in section 1.3 I have discussed some of the limitations of my research and, methodology in particular, such as I do not examine any Zhenotdel documents prior to 1924; there is a limited information about the archive itself; and that I could not establish how the documents were stored and moved around several times since the establishment of the archive.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to examine major Western and recent local scholarship on the topic of women's movement and gender in the early Soviet Union. My chapter will be divided into three major sub-sections: 1) how and what have the authors written on the topic of the Women's Department, that is, the Zhenotdel in Soviet Union, as well as the Bolshevik gender ideology? (2.1); 2) how have scholars described Soviet politics in Central Asia, including gender politics? (2.2); and, finally 3) where does my research come from and what questions can be posed after exploring the scholarly work published on this topic? (2.3).

2.1 The Soviet Gender Politics and the Zhenotdel

One of the earlier studies of gender and the women's movement in the Soviet Union is historian Susan Bridger's 1987 book titled *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union*, which briefly touches upon on the role of the Women's Department, the Zhenotdel, in the earlier years of the Bolshevik government. "Such growth as took place in the participation of peasant women in local soviets and cooperatives during the 1920s owed much to Zhenotdel influence."[13] The author highlights the importance and influence of the Zhenotdel in engaging peasant women into politics in rural areas of the Soviet Union. The book was a result of the author's research for her PhD dissertation, and she conducted her research in Belarus in 1980 and 1981. As part of the introduction to her book, Susan Bridger writes that she is grateful to the people who contributed to her research, including "women of Belorussia who

[13] Susan Bridger, *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11.

must perforce remain anonymous."[14] Perhaps the women who partook in Bridger's research expressed their wishes to be anonymous, however, the way Bridger formulates it here echoes the earlier perception of the Soviet Union by Western scholars which Sheila Fitzpatrick has summed up the belief, that the Soviet Union was "[…] as a completely top-down entity. The destruction of autonomous associations and the atomization of bonds between people produced a *powerless, passive, society that was purely an object of regime control and manipulation*. The main mechanism of control was terror […]"[15] (emphasis in italics mine). This is not to argue that Susan Bridger's brilliant study of women in the Soviet Union generally reiterates Cold War paradigms in the study of Soviet history, but, rather, how specific parts, such as "must perforce remain anonymous" suggest that terror and fear were reigning in the Soviet Union.

Another groundbreaking study of women's emancipation and questions of gender in the Soviet Union was written by Mary Buckley. In her 1989 book *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union,* Mary Buckley examines the ideology of gender of the Bolshevik government and the emancipation campaign that the early Soviet authorities launched. Similar to Susan Bridger's, Mary Buckley's book is based on extensive research that was conducted over a period of several years and as result of various fieldtrips to Russia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. In that sense, Buckley's research scope is more diverse than that of Bridger's, and her fieldtrips occurred and the book was published at the height of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. Buckley makes an attempt to "unpack" the Marxist roots of women's movements, thus providing a brief, yet detailed historical background of the Bolshevik understanding of the woman question. According to Mary Buckley, the Bolsheviks had a controversial approach towards the woman question and women's emancipation.

[14] Bridger, *Women in the Soviet Countryside*.
[15] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 80.

"The uneasy existence from 1919 to 1930 of the department for work among women (*otdel po rabote sredi zhenshchin*), or the *Zhenotdel* is it came to be known, reflects this combination of commitment and hostility to women's liberation."[16] Moreover, the author argues that in an authoritarian state, such as the Soviet Union, the ideology of everything, including that of gender, was 'constructed from above.'[17] In other words, Buckley's approach towards the question of emancipation of women also resembles the "*top-down and totalitarian.*" Through characterizing the state and its ideology as top-down and totalitarian, the author seems to leave little room for discussing the activities carried out by the citizens and their understanding of what the ideology, or Bolshevism, or communism were. Buckley comes to the conclusion that, in the end, "the Bolsheviks failed to emancipate women."[18] In other words, although at the theoretical level the woman question was advanced by Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand and other Soviet feminists, the end result was that the Bolsheviks did not manage to liberate women. Mary Buckley, in this book, centers her whole argument and line of thinking around Soviet ideology. In other words, the ideology was one of the determining factors of people's lives and that ideology was solely created 'from above' by the either the Communist Party, or the Soviet leadership in general. In such an analysis, where the central actors are the government and its ideology, it seems that there is limited space to observe and write about women themselves in the women's emancipation movement. Additionally, it relegates, or, at least minimizes, the roles of the women in the Communist Party, or in the building of socialism and in establishing the Bolshevik power. In that sense, the party or the government are perceived as monolithic entities that are "acting on" people, whereas the people are "acted upon" through the different ideologies and apparatus of an authoritarian regime.

[16] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1989, 2.
[17] Buckley, 5.
[18] Buckley, 57.

Alternatively stated, when the Communist Party of the Bolshevik government is portrayed as the central and main actor, there is not much space left to study the contribution of other actors, in our case, those women who were part of the women's emancipation movement. Moreover, the women who were very active in the revolution such as Nadezhda Krupskaya, Sofiia Smidovich, Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand and others, were constituent parts of the party and the government, and were influencing and shaping the ideology and politics as well. In other words, this problematizes an understanding of the whole process as being only between two parties: those who were the central actors and were acting upon, and those who were being acted upon. An understanding of women's emancipation in the early years of the Soviet Union requires a deeper and more complex analysis, in which there are several actors and factors influencing the ideology and politics.

This is not to say that Mary Buckley asserts that women in the women's emancipation movement were passive receivers of the revolution or liberation, however, the "top-down" paradigm of viewing such complex phenomena, which I claim she uses, might be a reason why she has missed major factors and influences of the ideology and politics. Furthermore, Mary Buckley provides a very detailed explanation of what the Women's Department was and the ways in which the Zhenotdel carried out its work in the Soviet Union. In fact, one can understand the history, ideology and politics of the Zhenotdel from Buckley's chapter. The author discusses at length the ways in which the Zhenotdel operated as in institution, thus mainly centering her discussion around the Central Zhenotdel in Moscow. Since the Zhenotdel was established as a sub-division of the Communist Party, the Women's Department was expected to serve the *class*, that is, making the building of socialism as the central and main purpose, however, as Mary Buckley concludes, the Zhenotdel served not only class but gender as well.[19] In other words, although the

[19] Buckley, 64.

Zhenotdel, just like any other political organization at that time, was expected to prioritize the common goal, that is, building a socialist society, it was not working any less towards the women's emancipation movement.

Similar to Mary Buckley, historian Elizabeth Wood, in her *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* book, published in 1997, also explores the women's movement in Russia from the Communist Party centered angle. Interestingly, Wood pays a great deal of attention to the linguistic aspect of both folk stories and sayings, and of party politics. In that sense, one of her central arguments is that the *baba* (pre-communist woman) had to join the Bolshevik struggle and building of socialism in order to win the title of *comrade* (communist woman). The whole emancipation movement, seen as part of the Bolshevik agenda, was supposed to be a project that would enable women to transform from *baba* into *the comrade*. However, as Wood writes, "Male comrades at the local and national levels were not entirely won over to the idea of separate organizing for women, however, despite the best efforts of central party authorities and women activists. Again and again organizers of women complained that they heard nothing but resistance and scorn from their male colleagues. The latter would refuse outright to do organizing work among women on 'principle,' saying that it sounded like 'feminism' and they wanted nothing to do with it. They would smile in a condescending way or laugh ironically at the women engaged in this work."[20] Moreover, Wood writes about one of the occasions when Alexandra Kollontai, preparing for the First National Congress of Women Workers and Peasants which took place in 1918, requested a conference hall for 300 women, the party officials thought that even a room for 80 people would suffice, for that was what the government was expecting,

[20] Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade : Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1997, 1997), 71.

that is, they held little belief in women's organizing.[21] However, when the congress gathered more than 1,100 women showed up, everyone was caught in surprise.[22] Analogous to Mary Buckley, Wood describes the women's emancipation in the Soviet Union as a 'feminism from above' imposed by the Bolsheviks on women of vast republics of the Soviet Union.[23] Wood highlights the fact that when the Bolsheviks came to power and launched the "liberation" project, they paid the utmost attention to politicization of women's engagement in the socialist building. For example, courses that were designed to teach women how to involve the masses of women into the political life had a political connotation. The author provides the example of "Red nurses" courses.[24] When women were taught nursing, which was especially important at the time since the Civil War was still on going, they were also taught about the war and the difference of that war from previous wars. In other words, what war was and meant during the empire under the tsar, what war meant during Kerensky's Provisional Government, and what war meant then, that is the Civil War between the Bolsheviks and the allies against them, carried different meanings. The Bolsheviks politicized many of the things, and were attaching particular connotations to everything from the war to women's emancipation to the building of socialism. Wood's contribution have thus showed the ways in which women were invited to engage in political life of the Soviet Union, however, the Bolsheviks or the state appears to be central actors of that involvement.

A more recent publication written about the Bolshevik gender agenda and the work of the Zhenotdel is a chapter by Anna Krylova. In her "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism" article, Krylova characterizes the Bolshevik gender agenda and politics as radical.

[21] Wood, 72.
[22] Wood, 72.
[23] Wood, 48.
[24] Wood, 90.

"What made the Soviet case different was its radical reconceptualization of what it meant to be a mother and a woman once the two were no longer perfectly aligned."[25] Before going into a characterization of the Bolshevik gender politics, Krylova lays out early Soviet and pre-Soviet theories regarding gender and family developed by early Bolsheviks. For example, the author mentions the 600-page long book of Alexandra Kollontai of 1913, *Society and Motherhood*, in which Kollontai theorized motherhood within the framework of socialism.[26] In other words, Kollontai described motherhood as a "social responsibility shared between a woman and society."[27] Motherhood was only one of the aspects of discussion within early Soviet socialist feminism, as Krylova points out. Early Soviet thinkers, including Alexandra Kollontai, thought that the *family* would eventually "wither away" or "die out" when the whole society would reach complete communism. Additionally, Krylova explains some of the work that the Zhenotdel carried out and characterizes the Women's Department as a "help yourself" type of organization.[28] The Zhenotdel, the author writes, was a grassroots organization operated and run by women, yet, there was also an increasing resistance, including male hostility, towards the organization both from the party and from others around the country. Through explaining the ideas of different theoreticians both before and after the Soviet Union was established, Krylova provides a chronological outline of the gender ideology of the Bolsheviks and how that changed throughout the first two decades of the Soviet Union. Bolshevik feminism, of course, did not come around overnight after the October revolution, but rather, was a long process of thinking and rethinking and defining what the woman question was and what was the gender ideology of the early Bolsheviks.

[25] Anna Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, ed. Silvio Pons and Stephen Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 434, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137024.020.
[26] Krylova, 431.
[27] Krylova, 431.
[28] Krylova, 436.

2.2 The early Soviet (gender) politics in Central Asia and the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan

The discussion of Soviet politics, including that of gender, in Central Asia brings about many interesting, at times controversial, perspectives. A more complex approach to the study of colonialism in Central Asia and of the question whether the Soviet Union was an imperial or colonial project, opened up a path for many debates in the contemporary scholarly field. If previously, that is from 1970s through 1990s, the theme of women's emancipation and Soviet gender politics in Central Asia is slightly touched upon, then post-2000 scholarship, that is, Douglas Northrop, Marianne Kamp et al., deeply engages with the topic of both Soviet politics in the region, and the gender component of it.[29] Mary Buckley,[30] Elizabeth Wood,[31] Barbara Evans Clements,[32] Richard Stites,[33] and others briefly discuss the women's liberation in the "Soviet East," however, the Central Asian women's emancipation, in particular, is discussed within the framework of a wider women's liberation project in the whole of the Soviet Union, but, mainly focusing on Russia. One of the earliest Western scholars to write on the topic of women's emancipation in Central Asia was an American author, Gregory J. Massell, who argued that the women in Central Asia were a *surrogate proletariat* for the Soviet authorities.[34] In other words, Massell's central argument is that since Central Asia lacked the group or mass that could be a basis for a proletarian class in Marxist understanding, women were perceived as that particular group

[29] Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire : Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 2004); Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.
[30] Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, n.d.
[31] Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*.
[32] Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[33] Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1978), 333.
[34] Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1974), 93–127.

that the Soviets could appeal to for revolutionary support. In other words, women, as most exploited and the least privileged, were expected to constitute the necessary proletarian foundation for the Bolsheviks' socialism. In this sense, Massell's approach also resembles the *top-down* approach used by the Western scholars, in which the Central Asian people, especially women, were passive recipients of the new Bolshevik politics that was imposed on them.

Adrienne Lynn Edgar, in her 2006 *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, dedicated a chapter of her book to women's emancipation in Turkmenistan during the Soviet ruling, called "Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule."[35] Edgar provides a very detailed picture of how the Soviets established their power in what is now called Turkmenistan. The author's central focus is about how the Bolshevik government created a "Soviet Turkmenistan' which was, prior to that, a tribal society. In other words, Edgar tries to highlight the ways in which Turkmenistan was "Sovietized," and for that purpose, a reconfiguration of gender was an important factor. "Until recently, most Western scholars viewed the Soviet regime as a 'breaker of nations,', a radically centralizing state that suppressed indigenous national consciousness. Over the past decade, however, historians have argued persuasively that the Soviet regime itself served as midwife to the separate states that emerged on its territory in 1991. The Soviet Union, in short, was a maker of nations."[36] What the author is referring to is the *korenizatsiia*, or, the nativization politics that the Soviets administered during their early years in Central Asia.[37] Furthermore, since gender was one of the most important components of the Soviet restructuring and transformation of the society, the gender order in Turkmenistan was subject to

[35] Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation : The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2006), 221–60.
[36] Edgar, 2.
[37] George Liber, "Korenizatsiia: Restructuring Soviet Nationality Policy in the 1920s," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 15–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1991.9993696.

change as well. In Central Asia, Edgar writes, there were several ethnic groups that were different in terms of their gender traditions, for example, in Uzbekistan women had to always be veiled, that is, they had to wear *paranaja* and *chachvon*, whereas among nomadic ethnic groups, such as Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, including Turkmen, women did not usually wear a veil. Thus, the strategy of *Hujum* (attack, onslaught), the campaign launched by the Bolsheviks that aimed at tackling the obstacles in the way of women's full equality with men, worked in the case of Uzbekistan, was not applicable to the case of Turkmenistan.[38] Therefore, the author argues, the Soviets had to come up with a different tactic, which appeared to be targeting "backward" marital and other traditions. In other words, since the veiling/unveiling politics could not be used in case of Turkmenistan, the Soviet authorities were aiming at marital and family law.

Resembling previously mentioned scholars, such as Mary Buckley, Elizabeth Wood, Richard Stites, who have written on the topic of women's liberation in Russia and the Soviet Union, Adrienne Lynn Edgar also seems to be paying less attention to and leaving little space for the discussion of women's and other people's activism/activities in the country. Local people of Central Asia are persistently thus portrayed as passive recipients of changes and transformations, especially so in the case of women's emancipation. The Soviet authorities, or the Bolshevik government, or even the local Zhenotdel, are portrayed as monolithic entities completely separate and detached from the local society. It is in this sense that we can observe the *top-down* approach in the literature about the Soviet Union in Central Asia, as explained by Fitzpatrick[39] and Viola.[40] What is missing in this type of analysis is an investigation of local people's participation in the whole so called "Sovietization" practice. Who were the people that supported the Bolsheviks and

[38] Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan,* 20.
[39] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History."
[40] Viola, "The Cold War in American Soviet Historiography and the End of the Soviet Union."

how? Who were the people that resisted the Soviet regime and why? Otherwise, the dichotomy of the "actors" and the "acted upon" is reiterated one more time.

A contemporary American historian of Central Asia and Soviet Union, Douglas Northrop, in his 2004 book titled *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, similar to Adrienne Lynn Edgar, puts his focus on the *veil* and *unveiling* in Central Asia under Soviet rule. However, what is different in the case of Northrop in comparison with Edgar, is that he uses a post-colonial and decolonial perspective to study the history of the region. Northrop characterizes the Soviet government and power as colonial. Particularly a type of colonialism resembling "the European colonialism in Islamic context, in which the Central Asian republics were perceived as civilizational laboratory for Russians that called themselves Europeans."[41] He goes on to describe the Soviet power in Central Asia as transformational, a "colonial modern power" which took on modernizing and civilizational missions.[42] In Northrop's book, the *veil* also takes a central position. In other words, the Soviet Bolshevik power that came to the region and wanted to modernize it used the *veil*, more precisely, *unveiling* as a means to the so-called transformation/modernization of the society. The fundamental change was supposed to happen through a reconfiguring of the gender politics in the region, and, especially so in Uzbekistan, that gender reconfiguration needed to happen through *unveiling*. In a way, as Northrop puts it, "The Uzbek woman's veil, in short, became more than a simple piece of cloth. To Bolshevik activists it represented their 'civilizing mission' and embodied all that was backward and primitive about Central Asia."[43] Tatiana Shchurko, in her 2015 article "Women of the East: Soviet gender order in Central Asia between colonization and emancipation", argues that the gender component was used

[41] Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 7.
[42] Northrop, 13.
[43] Northrop, 13.

as a basis for the legitimization for the colonial power.[44] Similar to Northrop, Shchurko argues that the Soviet power was carrying out colonial politics in Central Asia, and, specifically through creating an image of "the woman of the East", the authorities were using both race and gender in their discourse. Alternatively stated, through *othering* the women of Central Asia, the Bolsheviks conducted a specific type of politics in Central Asia, which included questions concerning the gender politics and women's emancipation.

Marianne Kamp extensively explores the history of the women's movement in Central Asia. She traces the liberation of women back to the *Jadid* reformers and puts women's emancipation in a chronological perspective. Several of her central chapters, similar to Shchurko, Northrop and Edgar, discuss the *veiling* of women and their *unveiling* under the Soviet government. Kamp agrees with Northrop in a sense that she looks at the *Hujum* as being one of the means of how the Bolshevik government sought to transform the society, that is, through reconfiguring the gender order, of which the central symbol was *unveiling.*[45] In order for the new government to succeed at transforming the society, argues Kamp, the Soviet authorities believed that the women's seclusion, which was practiced through veiling, had to end.[46] In other words, women and their bodies were perceived as the battle ground for change and transformation toward socialism. Marianne Kamp's research and approach is somewhat unique because she conducted in-depth interviews with women who were present during the *Hujum* campaign. By doing so, Kamp enables women to share their stories and speak for themselves. Kamp's approach is also different in a sense that her main actors are not only the government or communist party and their

[44] Georgy Mamedov and Oksana Shatalova, eds., "Понятия о советском в Центральной Азии [Concepts of Soviet in Central Asia]," *Альманах Штаба № 2. Центральноазиатское художественно-теоретическое издание. Понятия о советском в Центральной Азии*, 2015, 182.
[45] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 11.
[46] Kamp, 164.

documents, but women participants themselves. This represents an alternative to the *top-down* and totalitarian approach in studying the history of Soviet Central Asia. Kamp instead engages with various sources in order to show how the image of the *New Uzbek Woman* was created as a discourse and was used in politics.

2.3 My Research

In a way, in my own research of archival materials on the work of the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel, I will be using a similar approach that Kamp takes, that is, not treating the party or the Bolshevik government in Central Asia as a monolithic entity that acted on a Muslim society in Central Asia, but rather will attempt to unpack, through the archival documents, the women's movement in Kyrgyzstan, and ask what and how did the women of the Zhenotdel contribute to the emancipation project launched by the Bolshevik government. Regarding her own research, Marianne Kamp writes, "This volume's central concern is the experience of Uzbek women in this period of transformation, from early twentieth century into the 1930s."[47] My research, however, is different from Kamp's in several ways: 1) I do not engage with any oral histories or interviews; 2) I do not explore any publications or magazines in Kyrgyzstan during Soviet times, finally, 3) the primary sources I am analyzing in my research are Communist Party and other governmental documents, along with personal letters written by the Zhenotdel women and other reports. This make it difficult for me to delineate between the Communist Party or state documents and non-governmental documents, however, I will try to unpack the experiences of women in the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel through the archival documents.

[47] Kamp, 4.

In order to be able to carry out my own research, that is, unpacking the experiences of the Zhenotdel women in Kyrgyzstan, and to shed light on the women's emancipation movement and their activism in the region, I will be posing several guiding research questions. These questions will my analysis of the archival documents, and I hope the results will enable me to contribute to our knowledge of women's activism and Soviet gender politics in Central Asia at the dawn of the Soviet Union. Thus, in **Chapter 3** of my thesis I will examine the ways in which the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan carried out its work. What were the things that were different in the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan than that of in mainland Russia? What were the priorities the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan set toward the movement of women's emancipation?

As argued by various scholars such as Mary Buckley, Elizabeth Wood, Anna Krylova, Douglas Northrop and other, the relationship between the Zhenotdel and Communist Party of the Soviet Union was difficult in mainland Russia. Moreover, there, the women in the Zhenotdel were facing hostility from the male comrades and other government officials. In **Chapter 4** of this thesis, I will address questions such as: was the relationship between the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel and the local Communist party difficult? Furthermore, how did the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel conduct its work? Was it different than that of in mainland Russia? Was the "liquidation" of the Zhenotdel discussed among women in Kyrgyz Zhenotdel? Additionally, since Marianne Kamp, Adrienne Lynn Edgar and Douglas Northrop discuss *Hujum* in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan at length, was *Hujum* one of the means of achieving societal transformation in Kyrgyzstan as well? Was the *Kyrgyz Hujum* similar to the ones in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan? Can it be characterized as *Hujum* at all? Moreover, I will attempt to address such questions as: can Soviet orientalism and imperialism be traced through the archival documents? What were the power hierarchies and dynamic in the local Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored a few major scholarly publications on the topic of Bolshevik gender ideology and Soviet politics in Central Asia during its earlier years. In the first section of the chapter, I have examined works of Elizabeth Wood, Mary Buckley, Gregory Massell, Susan Bridger written on the topic of the Soviet gender politics in general and the work of the Zhenotdel. Then, in the second section of the chapter, I have examined how and what the scholars such as Adrienne Lynn Edgar, Douglas Northrop and Marianne Kamp, have written about the Soviet politics in Centrals Asia in general, and gender politics in particular. Finally, in the third section of my chapter I have highlighted my own research and what kind of questions can be posed regarding the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan and how those questions can be addressed through archival documents.

Chapter Three - The Work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

This chapter discusses the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930 and its contribution to the movement of emancipating women. The first section of the chapter will explore the ways in which the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel conducted its work in the 1920s. Based on the conclusions of the literature review, the questions that this chapter will try to address are: How similar or different was the work of the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel from that of the Zhenotdel in mainland Russia? In other words, what were the ways in which the work and approach of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan used to carry out its work?

The second section of the chapter will focus on the *Hujum* movement in Kyrgyzstan. As shown in Chapter 2.2, unveiling campaign launched by the Bolshevik and the local Zhenotdels in Central Asia, *Hujum* in particular, was seen as one of the main means of transformation of the society. This section will attempt to address such questions as: Was the Kyrgyz *Hujum* similar to that of in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan? How successful was the campaign in Kyrgyzstan and what were the outcomes of the *Hujum* here?

3.1 The Kyrgyz Zhenotdel and its work

3.1.1 The Soviet East

When the new government of the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, one of the first projects they "launched" was the emancipation of women, with the 1918 Code – The Soviet Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship as one of the first manifestations of the new politics. As historian Anna Krylova writes: "Passed in October 1918, the Code was the culmination of the

first revolutionary year of legislations that granted women an unprecedented package of rights in addition to the right to vote, already conferred by the Provisional Government several months before the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917."[48] The Bolsheviks were committed to the idea of women's complete inclusion into the political life of the society, therefore there were numerous legislations enacted that aimed at drawing more women into political and social/public life of the society. Above everything else, women were granted equal rights to those of men, which reflected the Bolsheviks' commitment to their idea of complete equality. This was, more or less, what was happening in mainland Russia. The "emancipatory project" and its means had to differ in Central Asia due to traditional, historical, societal, religious, in one word – contextual, reasons. Mary Buckley, in her "Women's Organizations: Bolshevik Theory and Practice" chapter, writes:

> Praxis had to address the problem that the pre-conditions of liberation were lacking. Most women were illiterate, lacking in skills, subordinate to their husbands, and living in rural, inward-looking, religious villages. Urban working-class women were easier to mobilise into politics than peasant women, but in the minority. Rural women in Russia were more accessible than Muslim women of Soviet Central Asia, where social structures were not sufficiently disintegrated to be ripe for re-fashioning (Massell,1974). Praxis therefore had to vary across the vast Soviet land mass.[49]

In other words, there needed to be a special strategy adopted for the people of Central Asia, especially regarding the emancipation of women. One of the major differences was that Central Asia had a predominantly Muslim population. Partly for this reason, the region was regarded as being deeply traditional and patriarchal, perhaps more so than mainland Russia or other parts of the Soviet Union. This is why, throughout most of the archival documents of the local Communist

[48] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 426; Mamedov and Shatalova, "Понятия о советском в Центральной Азии [Concepts of Soviet in Central Asia]," 183.
[49] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 60.

Party and the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1920s, the people of Central Asia, and women in particular, are described as "people of the East" or "women of the East". Sociologist Tatiana Shchurko highlights that the representation of the "woman of the East," the East of the Soviet Union, had been that the she was "more oppressed and specific, racialized, that is, defined through a set of cultural and everyday practice characteristics, and visual representation."[50] In other words, there was a specific discourse created about the "woman of the East", who was different than Russian woman, therefore a different approach was necessary to the "emancipation project".

Buckley writes that the Zhenotdel had three major purposes when it was established: 1) to expand the influence of the party through enlightening women about politics and life; 2) draw women into the party, trade unions and other cooperatives; and 3) liaise with those organizations and build dining halls, kindergartens, schools and so on.[51] Moreover, Buckley writes that in order to "cope with this broad brief, the administrative work of the *Zhenotdel* was broken down into three subdivisions and one sector: organizational-instructional work; agitation-propaganda; the press; and *work among women of the East*" (emphasis in italics mine).[52] This department for work among the "women of the East" became a separate sector that was specifically aiming at the work in Soviet East.

The theme of the "woman of the East" and of "Muslim woman" is quite prevalent in the archival documents of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and the local Communist Party in the 1920s, and I will discuss this in Chapter 4 (sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). The heads of local, district or town branches of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, when referring to the work that was being carried out in the Central Asian region, would always mention the work among the "woman of the East", which

[50] Mamedov and Shatalova, "Понятия о советском в Центральной Азии [Concepts of Soviet in Central Asia]," 185.
[51] Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 1989, 66.
[52] Buckley, 66.

in my research mainly refers to the work among the women of Kyrgyzstan. For example, the head of the Jalal-Abad branch of the Zhenotdel, Korgovina (unfortunately, I could not find Korgovina's first name neither in the archival documents nor in other publications), in her report/letter dated February 1, 1924, writes to Alexandra Bolgova, who was the director of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan (Kara-Kyrgyz oblast) at that time. In her letter, Korgovina says:

> *Much respected comrade Bolgova!*
>
> *Now I am writing to you my second letter and I, along with comrade Reznikova, must express our deepest gratitude for not forgetting about us, and for the instructor that you have sent, who is precious due to the fact that the work among the women of the East, here in Jalal – Abad, is happening for the first time, also, we express our hope that you won't cease your attention and direction, for these are most needed here in Jalal – Abad* […]
>
> *With Communist Greetings, Korgovina*[53]

The excerpt provided above is part of the letter and a report sent by the workers of the Jalal – Abad branch of the Zhenotdel, in which they briefly discuss the work their Zhenotdel branch had been conducting. This letter also reflects the abovementioned discourse, that is, of creating a specific image and understanding of the "woman of the East". Korgovina mentions that their work is a pioneering work, for work among the women of the East had not previously been conducted in Jalal -Abad. It is important to note that both Korgovina and Vera Reznikova are of Russian or Slavic ethnicities, and the women of the East are local Muslim women, that is either Kyrgyz or Uzbek or Tatar or Uighur. By 1924, the Soviet/Bolshevik discourse of the people of the East/women of the East had already permeated the everyday life and work of the Women's

[53] Fond 10 (Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Soviet Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks from 1924 to 1937), Opis 2, Document 945, L.1, CSA-KR.

Department of Kyrgyzstan and that is visible in this letter. As sociologist Tatiana Shchurko writes, the "woman of the East" was not a category first initiated by the Soviets or Bolsheviks, for it was a discourse that originated from the tsarist Russia times, however, the Bolsheviks adopted it and developed it, especially in the 1920s.[54] What is also interesting to note is the use of "*comrade*" as one of the attributes of the Soviet language can also be seen in Korgovina's letter. Korgovina addresses Alexandra Bolgova as *Comrade Bolgova* and signs the letter with "*With Communist Greetings*". Finally, the letter shows that the work among women was taking place, with local Zhenotdel branches enthusiastically trying to advance their work. Korgovina appears eager to ensure that her own branch continues to capture Alexandra Bolgova's attention. She seems to be desperately calling upon Bolgova for guidance.

The phrase – "woman of the East", or "the East" in general, can be detected in most of the archival documents of that time, especially so when the letter, or the report, or the brief, is written by Russian/Slavic Zhenotdel members, and is referring to local/native women, that is, Kyrgyz or Uzbek, or Uighur or Dungan. In a comradely letter addressed to Nadezhda Krupskaya, written sometime in 1925, Nikonova (unfortunately, the first name of Nikonova could not be established), then head of the Kyrgyz Central Zhenotdel, reports on the work that had been carried out by the Zhenotdel, as well as requests help for their work. The full letter reads as follows:

COMRADELY LETTER

Organized women of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast are sending their warmest greetings to Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya!

The worker women's and peasant women's department of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast asks you to send us at least one portable movie

[54] Mamedov and Shatalova, "Понятия о советском в Центральной Азии [Concepts of Soviet in Central Asia]," 181.

projector to be able to screen films at the houses of peasant women, red yurts, and clubs. The ***specificity of the work here in the East*** *and the poverty here in Kirgizia is making us to request this from you. If you will send us what we are asking for, this will be a huge contribution to our work. Also, we ask that you send literature for the peasant women, who now comprise 30%, and preferably in Kyrgyz language. If it is not available in Kyrgyz language, we could translate, but we do not have the financial means for that. We hope that you, Nadezhda Konstantinovna, won't leave us without your attention and will help fulfill our request.*

With comradely greetings,

Director of the Kirov department for worker and peasant women NIKONOVA

Senior instructor MATROKHINA

Address: Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast

Frunze city, Pishpek Kirov Committee of the All-Soviet Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks)

Department of working and peasant women

There are two things that are particularly important in this letter: the use of "East" and "organized". As mentioned above and visible in many archival documents, the image of "the East" is reiterated in this example, that is, describing how the work in the East is difficult and has its own specificities.[55] The poverty, and the specific type of work that the Zhenotdel had to carry out in the East, forces the directors to write a request to Nadezhda Krupskaya. It is interesting that

[55] The phrases "Woman of the East" or "the East" has been mentioned in following archival documents: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949, L. 3; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 983, L. 18, 19; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 945, L. 2; Fond 10. Opis 2, Document 947, L. 1; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 958, L. 71, CSA-KR.

the letter mentions the "specificity" of the work and "poverty" as the reasons why the work was so difficult to conduct. Furthermore, the part about "organized women of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast" shows the level of contribution that the members of the Zhenotdel put to the emancipation project. In other words, the enthusiasm and eagerness of the Zhenotdel members to carry on with the work, despite the difficulties, demonstrates their belief and activism. What is also important is that the director of the Zhenotdel and its other workers, in their request, took into a consideration the local context: asking specifically for a portable movie screener and for translated instructions or brochures. The portability of the movie screener was important in Kyrgyzstan, where most of the population was nomadic, moving all-year-round, which is why the Zhenotdel wanted to display films in moving *red yurts* and clubs. Moreover, they were specifically asking for instructions and brochures in Kyrgyz language, and if that was not available, then resources for translation. Once again, this shows to what extent the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan particularly aimed at local women and the dedication of the local Zhenotdel workers to contribute to the emancipation movement.

Another document is a report written in 1927 and sent by a young female student, Belinskaya F.L. The report discusses the work among women in Naryn, a city in central region of Kyrgyzstan. Belinskaya at that time was a 2nd-year student at the Communist University named after Sverdlov in Moscow.[56] Belinskaya went to Kyrgyzstan to volunteer at the local Communist Party branch. After arriving in Frunze, the local Communist Party branch directed Belinskaya to the Zhenotdel, where she was a volunteer.[57] In her report, Belinskaya writes that upon arrival in

[56] Sverdlov Communist University was a university established in 1918 and was preparing students for Soviet and Party Work. For more information, please visit https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Ia.+M.+Sverdlov+Communist+University.

[57] Frunze was a former name of the capital of Kyrgyzstan, which was Pishpek until 1926 and then was renamed to Frunze and stayed as Frunze until 1991. In 1991, the name of the capital was changed to Bishkek.

Frunze, she worked at the Central Zhenotdel for two weeks after which she was sent to Naryn region to inspect the work of the Zhenotdel there. After she returned from Naryn, Belinskaya wrote a detailed report on the process of the work among women and Sovietization in Kyrgyzstan and in Naryn region in particular. Her report demonstrates how dissatisfied she was with the work in progress. "We then learnt about the process of the work among women and the Komsomol. The work among the women of the East is of specific character, especially so in Kirgizia, where patriarchal-clan relationships not only have not died, but are actually quite strong and dominant, which also reflects on everyday life of the local population and especially women."[58] Belinskaya's report describes the poor conditions of women's lives, attributing them as characteristic of the East, because of the patriarchal, clan and kinship relations that existed in the region. In her 4-page report she also writes explicitly about early and coerced marriages of young girls, the bad conditions of married women, and so forth. Belinskaya's report shows that the discourse of the "East" was still prevalent and linked to traditionalism of the society and patriarchy. Her report reiterates the portrayal of Soviet Central Asia as "the East", but also examines and discusses the practical problems of that the *Sovietization* of Central Asia faced such as: women's low position in the society, a huge age gap in marriages, coerced and early marriages, difficulties for women with getting a divorce, etc.

3.1.2 Marriage and Family Reforms

In addition to the specificity of the "East", another way in which the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan was different was the approach to transformations of marriage and family. As mentioned earlier, historian Anna Krylova writes that the new legislation "eschewed the

[58] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 92, 93, 94, 95, CSA-KR.

patriarchal tenets of pre-Soviet regime by abolishing women's inferior legal status and establishing civil marriage based on individual rights."[59] According to the new legislation, women and men became equal individuals with equal rights to enter marriage, ask for a divorce, and have child custody. In Central Asia, in order to implement the new legislation the authorities had to develop a nuanced approach, that is, not only fighting for equal marriage, but also uprooting the causes of unequal marriage to begin with. Therefore, one of the trajectories of the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan was fighting the *kalym* (a bride-price paid by the groom's family upon marriage), marriages at young age, polygamy, and coerced marriages against the will of young girls. In the Zhenotdel archival documents from 1924 to 1930 I have looked at, the theme of early marriages and kalym come up frequently. The Zhenotdel members believed that if the issues with polygamy, early and coercive marriages were solved, that would help establish civic equality in marriage.

In a circular letter that was sent on November 24, 1924, the director of the Osh branch of the Zhenotdel, Zainab Prazdnikova informs other Zhenotdel branches of Kyrgyzstan about women's conferences that were organized that year in three different places in the south of Kyrgyzstan: Uzgen, Kashgar and Naukat. These conferences and meetings were especially important, for they were happening during the years of the *Basmachi* movement, a military struggle between the newly established Soviet government and local groups of people that opposed the Bolsheviks.[60] Soviet historiography depicted Basmachi as "feudal" and religious and nationalist groups that were opposing socialist ideals. Because of this opposition, the Soviets used all means, that is, military, ideological, agitational and propaganda in their struggle against the Basmachi groups. The Zhenotdel, too, along with Revolutionary Committee, had agitational

[59] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 426.
[60] Beatrice Penati and of Hisar Ibrāhīm Beg/Bik, "The Reconquest of East Bukhara: The Struggle against the Basmachi as a Prelude to Sovietization," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. iv (2007): 521.

purposes thus was also active in the struggle against the Basmachi. As we know from Mary Buckley's book, one of the subdivisions of the Zhenotdel was "agitation-propaganda."[61] Thus Zainab Prazdnikova's 1924 circular letter mentions the Basmachi as well. An excerpt from the letter goes as follows:

> […] *When we started our work in kishlak,*[62] *where women barely even heard kind words, hundreds of women started coming to the Zhenotdel and asking for help. Building on this wave of women coming to the Zhenotdel, with the help of the local party cell, we organized a women's conference in Naukat district, and around 50 Kyrgyz and Uzbek people attended that conference; besides, there were also conferences in Uzgen and Kashgar regions which were attended by Kyrgyz and Uyghur women. At these conferences, the agenda consisted of such issues as:* ***kalym****,* ***marrying young girls off****,* ***enlightenment****, and the Naukat conference adopted the following ruling: we, the native women, were oppressed by the basmachi and could not run our households peacefully, and now we are free from the basmachi and have the opportunity to manage our households, and we thank the Soviet government led by the Communist Party* […] (emphasis in bold is mine).[63]

This circular letter demonstrates the ways in which the Zhenotdel operated in Kyrgyzstan. The letter indicates what the women of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan saw as problems in their society that they were trying to address: the bride-price that was to be paid for the bride upon marriage and coercive marriage of young girls against their will. In her aforementioned report student Belinskaya also mentioned this particular problem in Naryn region. Part of her report discusses a 60-year-old man who married a 14-year-old young girl and how she was forced to stay

[61] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 66.
[62] Initially meant "wintering place" or winter camp, but can also mean any kind of rural settlement, something resembling a village.
[63] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 945, L.14, CSA-KR.

married.[64] One last thing to point out in the 1924 circular letter is that the Basmachi movement was perceived as the cause of the problems that women faced. Zainab Prazdnikova mentions that the Soviet government helped women break free and run their households peacefully. The excerpt also shows what the women of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan did in order to tackle those problems through their *organized* effort.

Moreover, in order to strengthen the effect of the Bolshevik legislation concerning marriage and family Zhenotdel members highlighted and reported about special judicial cases. For instance, a circular report from 1927 addressed to other Zhenotdel branches and governmental organizations, written by Avgusta Vyboldina, head of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, informed other Zhenotdel branches and Bolshevik organizations about particular and demonstrative court hearings where men were tried and sentenced for violations of the new legislation. In Jalal – Abad, writes Avgusta Vyboldina, "there was an illustrative court hearing for polygamy, and he was sentenced to 8 months of community labor and his property was confiscated and distributed between his wives."[65] Additionally, there is a detailed report written by the Main Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Republic in 1928, Khudaiberdiyev, which states that these new legislation and epy struggleы are finally bearing results, such as: 1) increasing the number of female court members – *narzasedateli* (People's Assessors translated from Russian language) – and 2) the number of people tried and receiving actual sentences for particular crimes of domestic violence. Narzasedateli was a Soviet court system, in which there were two citizens along with the judge who presided over the trial. Narzasedateli could only preside and hear the cases that were in their first instance. According to Kyrgyzstan's Main Prosecutor report, the

[64] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 92, 93, 94, 95, CSA-KR.
[65] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 48, CSA-KR.

percentage of women members of the Narzasedateli was 15,8% in 1927, but in 1928, women comprised 38,9% of Narzasedateli in Kyrgyzstan.[66] Moreover, the number of court cases about violations of the new legislation, also increased from 18 in 1925 to 38 in 1927.[67] By reporting about illustrative court trials and sentences, both the local government and the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan were trying to raise awareness about women's rights and equality under the new government and showing the ways in which the new legislation was being implemented.

3.1.3 Mobility

Zhenotdel workers in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, needed to take into consideration the nomadic lifestyle of the local people. Kazakhs and most Kyrgyz, and some of the Turkmen were living a nomadic lifestyle, unlike the Tajik and Uzbek, who were settled. Kazakhs in the 1930s would be forcibly settled during the apex of Goloshchekin's, - First Secretary of the Kazakh Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union - collectivization in Kazakhstan.[68] But during the years I am looking at in my analysis of the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan the people were still living a nomadic lifestyle, thus a special approach to the work of the Zhenotdel and the women's emancipation project had to be taken, which consisted of setting up *mobile* or moving *red yurts, red corners* and *clubs.*

Mary Buckley, in her "Women's Organisations: Bolshevik Theory and Practice" chapter, briefly mentions the nomadic women in Kazakhstan. "Delegates' meetings were similarly unable to reach the nomadic women of Kazakhstan. Instead, special Red Tents moved with the nomads, trying to attract the attention of women and then propagandise the advantages of Soviet power. In

[66] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 993, L. 36-45, CSA-KR.
[67] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 993, L. 36-45, CSA-KR.
[68] Charles McGrath and Nygmet Ibadildin, "Kazakh Famine 1928-1932," *Ukrainian Policymaker*, 2018, 14, https://doi.org/10.29202/up/2/2.

order to make headway, careful attention had to be paid to indigenous customs and expectations."[69] In other words, the workers of the Zhenotdel had to adapt to the local contexts and lifestyle in order to carry out their work. Similar to what Buckley is describing in the case of Kazakhstan, the people in Kyrgyzstan were also nomadic, and special arrangements were needed to be made. As in Kazakhstan, the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan also paid great attention to the nomadism, therefore they also had to come up with mobile and moving "tents."

For example, a circular brief written by the Organizer of the Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Russia Communist Party, Vasiliy Burov-Petrov, on the occasion of the 8th of March celebration in Kyrgyzstan in 1926, lists all the achievements of the Zhenotdel branches around the country, such as opening a *likbez* school, setting up work artels for women, opening a hospital for women and children in Karakol, kindergartens in other cities.[70] The list of the results of the work of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan, together with the local party cell, included a *red yurt* that was set up in the Jalal – Abad region. "In the district, there had been launched a red yurt and a kindergarten (in Oktyabrsk settlement), the latter had been launched with the funds of the cooperation."[71] Moreover, besides setting up *red yurts*, the Zhenotdel also paid close attention to the seasonal movements of the people and, in some parts, followed them, providing the women the opportunities to learn reading and writing, as well as organizing courses on legal matters and political enlightenment courses. An excerpt from a 1929 report, written by the head of the Naryn branch of the Zhenotdel and addressed to the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan reads:

[69] Buckley, 71.
[70] *Likbez* (Russian Ликбез) liquidation of illiteracy campaigns aiming at eradicating illiteracy during earlier years of the Bolshevik government. *Artels* were cooperative and union organizations, mostly comprised of peasants and workers. To read more about the artels, please read at https://www.thefreedictionary.com/artels
[71] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 96, L. 4, 5, CSA-KR.

> Main *jailoos*[72] are "Arpa", "Aksay", "Sonkul", "Kurtka-Terek", in every jailoo, since the time the people have moved, there have been Women's Red Yurts established. The main work and tasks of Women's Red Yurts are liquidation of illiteracy, and by August 20, in Arpa Red Yurt there are 48 students, 45 in Aksay Red Yurt, and 50 in Sonkul Red Yurt. In Naryn Sonkul, there are 36 people. Besides, there are *readings* organized, and conversations concerning the themes of rights, domestic violence, and other political topics. Moreover, there have been legal support activities carried out.[73]

These and other documents, be it letters or reports or circular briefs, demonstrate how a special approach was needed to be developed to conduct the work among women in Central Asia, especially in nomadic parts of the region.[74] The local Zhenotdel branches and its workers were committed to promote the work among women and were doing everything they could to reach out to more women. Furthermore their work not only addressed "political enlightenment", but also covered key aspects of women's everyday life such as literacy, legal support, letting them know about their rights under the new government, and courses on hygiene and childbearing and childrearing. The very fact that the Zhenotdel organized and established Red Yurts which Mary Buckley refers to as "red tents", and that those Red Yurts were moving around following the people, and all those activities that were organized in those Red Yurts – indicated how dedicated the Zhenotdel women were to their purpose and the tremendous work they were willing and able to do.[75]

[72] Summering place; summer pastureland usually high up in the mountains.
[73] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 1000, L. 31, CSA-KR.
[74] These are discussed in archival documents such as: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949, L. 20; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 947, L.1; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 958, L. 72; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 96, L. 4, 5; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 983, L. 29; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 788, L. 72; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 1002, L. 7, CSA-KR.
[75] Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 1989, 89.

3.2 The Hujum in Kyrgyzstan

The Hujum, an official campaign launched by the Communist Party, officially started in 1926. As historian Marianne Kamp writes, "In 1926, the Communist Party leadership in Moscow, with strong input from the Women's Division and from Central Asia Bureau members, decided to launch a campaign that would radically change women's lives. The Hujum, or 'attack', was supposed to be a sort of cultural 'Great Leap Forward', designed to bring women from the 'backward' nationality groups, especially Muslims of Central Asia and the Caucasus, into modern Soviet life. The Hujum as originally envisioned focused on enforcing laws that gave women equality, creating literacy programs and bringing women into the labor force. Communists in Central Asia and the Caucasus were supposed to attack every obstacle to women's equality."[76] The Hujum, literally meaning "attack" or "onslaught," was supposed to bring down all the barriers that women faced on their way to full equality and enjoying their rights given by the Soviet government. Although the Hujum was initially designed to be operating through different means, in Central Asian countries, the Hujum became mostly associated with unveiling. Most of the agitational propaganda particularly aimed at unveiling of women in Soviet Central Asia. The unveiling campaign was supposed to symbolize the modern transformation of the society. The unveiling campaigns in various parts of Central Asia started way earlier than the official Communist campaign launched in 1926. Kamp, in her "Unveiling Before The Hujum" chapter, examines the role of the veil and its history in Central Asian cultures. Moreover, she compares the unveiling in Central Asia to other unveiling/modernizing efforts made in Turkey, Iran, Egypt, and Afghanistan. Exploring the history of veiling and unveiling in Central Asia, Kamp writes that "[f]or reformers in Islamic societies in the early twentieth century, the veil in its many forms was

[76] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 150.

the symbolic antithesis of modernity. Some radical reformers thought that women's liberation could be achieved only if the veil disappeared."[77] Hence the discussions around the veiling and unveiling of women had been taking place before the Communist Party launched its campaign in 1926. The veil, or the Central Asian version of it called *Paranja* (head and body veil), had been quite widespread in southern parts of Kyrgyzstan. According to the archival materials of the Zhenotdel, there had been numerous occasions of public unveiling in Kyrgyzstan, both before the Hujum was officially announced and afterwards.

In Kyrgyzstan, the public unveilings mostly happened around and were dedicated to the 8th of March celebration of International Worker Women's Day. In other cases, the unveilings were also dedicated to the October Revolution and to the Socialist/Communist struggle for building a better society. For example, in the same circular letter of 24 November 1924 addressed to the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and to a newspaper, Zainab Prazdnikova reports about a woman who took her veil off on the occasion of the 7th anniversary of the October Revolution. The letters reads: "Uzbek woman, comrade *Tuta-Bibi Yuldasheva*, who has been oppressed for decades took her paranja off on the 7th anniversary of the October Revolution. Under the Red Pennant, she took an oath to work for the sake of emancipation of the women of the East."[78] What we can infer from this letter is that women were symbolically and literally taking their paranjas off already in 1924, and were doing so in the name of the October Revolution and under the Red Pennant. Furthermore, not only did women who took off their paranajas envision a transformation of the society, but they were actively committed to it, as emphasized by their taking an oath to work towards the emancipation of the women of the East. The unveiling, that is, taking the paranja off, and October

[77] Kamp, 131.
[78] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 945, L. 14, CSA-KR.

Revolution and the Red Pennant – these altogether symbolized the change and modernist transformation of the society.

If before 1926 these unveilings happen episodically in different places, then after the Soviet government officially launched its campaign in 1926, all public unveilings were connected to and seen as part of the Hujum. From the archival records of the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan, from 1926 onwards, there are numerous reports and letters that specifically write about Hujum. After the Hujum campaign was officially launched, the numbers of unveilings and the places that it took place increased significantly. Almost every report, especially so from the south of the country, contained a sentence or two regarding the Hujum. Most of the reports would usually have a few lines of the names of women who took their paranjas off and where, thus reports would usually be "so and so women took their paranjas off there and there."[79]

The official Hujum launched by the Communist Party and the *SredAzBuro*, started in Kyrgyzstan a year later, in 1927. SredAzBuro (translated from Russian as Central Asian Bureau) was Central Asian Bureau of Central Committee. The SredAzBuro had existed from 1922 to 1934 and was a very important political organization that helped the Bolsheviks centralize and consolidate their power in the Central Asian region.[80] A brief written in April of 1927 and sent to all the Communist Party cells, as well as Zhenotdels and other political organizations in Kyrgyzstan was titled *«The results of the 3 months of work under the "attack" slogan*."[81] The brief consists of 6 points that discuss different aspects of the work carried out by the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan during the Hujum. The third point in the brief reads that the "beginning of the attack

[79] These parts are also discussed in following archival document: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 993, L. 31, 32, 44; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 1000, L. 17, CSA-KR.
[80] Shoshana Keller, "The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan," *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 2–3 (June 1, 2003): 281, https://doi.org/10.1080/0263493032000157771.
[81] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 18, CSA-KR.

in Kirghizia is on the 8th of March."[82] Showing that the Hujum in Kyrgyzstan started in 1927, a year later than in Uzbekistan. The 5th point in the brief reports about the meeting that the Zhenotdel organized on the 8th of March in Kyrgyzstan and announced their tasks for "the emancipation of women and *categorical attack* on old lifestyle."[83] The brief also mentions the three Uzbek women "solemnly taking their paranjas off" at the 8th of March meeting.[84]

From 1927 onwards most of the letters, reports, briefs or circulars of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan mention women taking their paranajas off. For instance, in an explanatory letter Avgusta Vyboldina, then head of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, reports on the number of women in different places in Kyrgyzstan that took their paranajas off: five women in Frunze, three in Tokmak, 23 women in Jalal – Abad who were wives of Komsomol members.[85] However, in the same letter, Avgusta Vyboldina also noted that 30 women who previously had taken their paranajas off, asked for a permission to put them back on. Another report, addressed to the Central Zhenotdel and other governmental organizations in Kyrgyzstan was written by Semenova and Aitmatov from Jalal – Abad in 1928.In their report of 1928, Semenova who was a director of the Jalal- Abad Zhenotdel, and Torokul Aitmatov who was a responsible secretary of the local Communist Party of Jalal – Abad, list the names of the places and the number of women that took part in demonstrative taking off the paranja under the Hujum campaign.[86] Thus, there had been 5 women in Bazar Kurgan, 6 in Maikent, 5 in Suzak (towns in the south of the country), who unveiled on the occasion of the celebration of March 8th in 1928. These reports that always mentioned the number of women who had taken their paranjas off under the slogan of Hujum show that *unveiling*

[82] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 18, CSA-KR.
[83] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 18, CSA-KR.
[84] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 18, CSA-KR.
[85] Frond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, CSA-KR.
[86] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 993, L. 31, 32, 33, CSA-KR.

became one of the primary meanings of the Hujum. This is not mean, however, that unveiling was the only symbol of Hujum, but, to some extent, it became a marker of the success of the Hujum in Kyrgyzstan.

3.2.1 The consequences of the Hujum campaign in Kyrgyzstan

The Zhenotdel workers in Kyrgyzstan were not only persuading and encouraging women to take their paranjas off in the name of the October Revolution and women's emancipation, but they were also trying to come up with a strategy on how to proceed afterwards the women unveiled.

In numerous cases the Hujum campaign did not bring the results that the government or the Zhenotdel had wanted or expected. In most cases, the women who took part in the campaign found themselves caught between two fires, that is, between the traditional and conservative society on the one hand and the Soviet government and the Zhenotdel on the other. In other words, although the "attack" did change some aspects of women's everyday lives, it also caused harm to some of them. Marianne Kamp, at the beginning of her chapter "The Counter-Hujum: Terror and Veiling" writes that "In a six-month period in 1927 and 1928, at least 235 Uzbek women were murdered for unveiling."[87] Moreover, she writes that in the period from 1927 to 1929, around 2,000 women were murdered in Uzbekistan for their participation in, or some kind of connection to the Hujum campaign.[88] Thus, apart from judgmental behavior and disapproving talk about the women who took off their paranajas, there was also serious physical violence and even murders committed, where the activist women would be tracked down and killed. Kamp writes that the violence was not only a rejection of the unveiling, but, in fact, was directed against the

[87] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 186.
[88] Kamp, 186.

emancipation project in general, against women getting education, starting to participate in social and political life, attending meetings and assemblies, engaging in the paid labor force and so on.[89] These and other types of crimes against women were taking place in Kyrgyzstan as well.

Unfortunately I could not locate statistics of the total number of women, who became the victims of crimes directed against the Hujum in Kyrgyzstan. However, the archival documents concerning the work of the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan do contain several reports regarding the crimes committed against the women who partook in the campaign or were actively engaged in the women's emancipation movement.

In an explanatory letter written about the "Results of the 3 months of work towards the 'factual emancipation' of women", Avgusta Vyboldina reports about the state of the Hujum and unveiling in Osh in 1927. [90] A group of women who had previously unveiled were now asking for permission to put their veils back on, for people were laughing at them. Moreover, another group of women were asking to stop the removal of paranjas. After this, 30 women in Osh region put their veils back on, for they were concerned about their safety and wellbeing.

In the same letter, Avgusta Vyboldina reported the murdering of a woman named Kurban Bibi in Osh in 1927.[91] Kurban Bibi was an activist woman in the south of the country, she was also a delegatka, and even more, she was a member of the local Council of Soviets. Kurban Bibi was murdered because of her active position and participation in the emancipation movement. Moreover, there were other hostile activities and behaviors from the side of the male relatives of the women, and there are many cases when a husband would violently beat his wife for going to

[89] Kamp, 187.
[90] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, CSA-KR.
[91] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 48, CSA-KR.

the Zhenotdel; there were cases when the husband would drive his wife out of the home for participating in the Zhenotdel activities and so on.[92] Tatiana Shchurko, in her article "Hujum: women's emancipation during early Soviet experiments in Soviet Kirghizia (1918-1930)," also gives examples of reports of crimes during the Hujum in Kyrgyzstan. "In Karasu (adjacent to Osh) basmachi captured two activist women, who were agitating for delegate assemblies, wildly murdered them and hung their bodies in a local bazaar"; "A 22-year-old activist Alymkan Mamytkulova was murdered by her husband during the court hearing that was supposed to divorce them. She was attending women's meetings and was studying at *likbez* school against her husband's will, for which he was severely beating her after every meeting. Not being able to put up with it anymore, Alymkan filed a divorce application and during that hearing her husband knifed her with a dagger"[93] Stories and reports like these were quite common during that period, and therefore, any kind of involvement of women in activism was done at a big risk.

One of the cases that received a huge attention was the case of a 17-year-old girl from Osh named Urkuya Salieva, who was a Komsomol secretary, then got actively engaged in the political life of Kyrgyzstan. "Four years later she joined the Communist Part and became a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic. Additionally, she was elected chairperson of the collective farm Kyzyl-Asker (later named after Urkuya Salieva). Shortly thereafter, in 1934, Salieva and her husband were murdered by Basmachi fighters, who were part of the anti-Bolshevik movement which at the time had control over large parts of Southern

[92] These are also mentioned in archival documents such as: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 945, L. 2; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L.10, CSA-KR.

[93] Tatiana Shchurko, "«Худжум»: женская эмансипация в период ранних советских «экспериментов» в Советской Киргизии (1918-1930 гг.) (авторка: Татьяна Щурко) ["Hujum": women's emancipation during early Soviet experiments in Soviet Kirghizia (1918-1930).]," Фемштаб, April 25, 2015, http://www.art-initiatives.org/ru/content/hudzhum-zhenskaya-emansipaciya-v-period.

Kyrgyzstan in the years 1917-1926."[94] As is seen form the excerpt, Urkuya Salieva was murdered along with her husband particularly for her active position in the Sovietization process and women's emancipation movement. This particular case was especially commemorated by the Soviet government and historians to that extent, that they made a film about her called "Bow to the Fire", released in 1971.[95]

In order to stop the ongoing crimes against the activist women and to prevent future crimes, the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan carried out various tactical activities such as organizing lectures about women's rights, about new legislations that were adopted and implemented, but, most importantly, there were demonstrative court trials, where the men who committed crimes were publicly tried and sentenced, particularly for domestic violence and other crimes against women who were involved in activism.[96]

An explanatory report written by Avgusta Vyboldina in 1927 demonstrates what kind of measures were taken against the husbands or other men who committed crimes against their wives. Thus, Vyboldina mentions an incident that happened in a town called Tokmok in 1927.

> "An interesting thing happened in Tokmok. Two *bais*[97]having heard that the person who was responsible for women's emancipation campaign in Kyrgyzstan was coming, abducted a local worker and activist woman, fearing that she might say something and that her words would be influential and encourage for more emancipation. They abducted her and took her away to the mountains. This case has been forwarded to the court."[98]

[94] For more information about Urkuya Salieva, please visit https://centralasien.org/en/40-women-of-kyrgyzstan-portraits/urkuya-salieva/
[95] https://centralasien.org/en/40-women-of-kyrgyzstan-portraits/urkuya-salieva/
[96] Illustrative court trials are also mentioned in Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 993, L. 36 and 44, CSA-KR.
[97] A rich person who owns lots of cattle and/or land, etc.
[98] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 47, CSA-KR.

Moreover, the same report notes 5 Uzbek women in Frunze that took their paranajas off, and even *mullahs*[99] were agitating for that, and that "there has been two illustrative hearings at the 1st and 2nd precincts of the People's Court."[100] The report, then, goes on to list all the activities that the Zhenotdel workers carried out in different parts of the country: three women took their paranajas off in Tokmok and there had been three illustrative court trials; 23 women unveiled in Jalal – Abad and there were three demonstrative court hearings and so on. [101]

One very important and interesting case to draw our attention to took place in Osh that same year. The murder of an activist woman named Kurban Bibi, mentioned above, drew a huge attention in the public. The court hearings regarding this case were open to all. The trial of the murderer of Kurban Bibi went on for days, and more than 600 women attended those court hearings on a daily basis.[102] After the court hearings, writes Avgusta Vyboldina in her report "Uzbek women started taking their paranjas off en masse. During the first ceremonial assembly of Communist Party members, Komsomol, and Koshchi organization, which was a workers' mass union in Soviet Central Asia that was formed in 1920, there were 94 women who unveiled. Then, later, at the meeting of workers union there were around 100-200 women who took their paranajas off. By the 1st of May, there were more than 500 women in the region who took their paranajas off."[103] In other words, although the crimes were horrendous and were putting activist women, and women who unveiled, at great risk, that still did not frighten off women who were actively engaging and participating in the women's emancipation movement. Moreover, more than 600 women attending the court trials and illustratively taking their paranjas off demonstrates to what

[99] Muslim cleric trained in religious law and doctrine and usually holding an official post. For more information, please read at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mullah
[100] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 47, CSA-KR.
[101] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 48, CSA-KR.
[102] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 48. CSA-KR.
[103] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 48, CSA-KR.

extent women contributed to the whole movement and to the building of Soviet socialism in Central Asia.

The Hujum, launched by the Bolshevik government, and the unveiling campaign that preceded it, were clearly controversial. The attitude of the Central Asian women towards taking part in the project was also double-sided. On the one hand, there were those who were eagerly and actively participating in the whole emancipation movement; on the other – there were women who were skeptical about unveiling, or in general, afraid for their safety and life. Either way, this whole campaign, launched by the Bolsheviks and backed by the local women's emancipation movement and the Communist Party units, put women into a precarious and hazardous position: they were caught between the newly established government with all of its politics on the one hand; and a conservative, at times violent attitude from the local population. Additionally, it is important to note that that the Hujum was not only about unveiling. In other words, although taking off paranjas became a symbolic epitome of the campaign, it was not limited to paranjas only; rather the Hujum campaign extended into educational campaign, legal consultations, organizing artels and other employment opportunities for women and so on.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the work of the Women's Department, that is, the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and the ways in which the project of emancipating women was different in Central Asia compared to mainland Russia.

In section 3.1.1 of this chapter I have explored the topic of the "Soviet East". One of the ways in which the work of the Zhenotdel was different in Central Asia was the use of a specific discourse of the "woman of the East", created during the tsarist rule of Central Asia but appropriated by the Bolsheviks. The archival documents I have analyzed in my research also

demonstrate how the category of the "woman of the East", or "people of the East" in general, was prevalent in earlier years of the Bolshevik government, including the work of the Women's Department.

In section 3.1.2 of this chapter I have written about the specific ways in which the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan carried out its work regarding the Soviet Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship. More precise, in order to implement the new Soviet legislations, the local government of Kyrgyzstan and the Women's Department were particularly aiming at working towards tackling polygamy, early and coercive marriages and bride price. The work carried out by the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan included reporting on demonstrative/illustrate trials, in which violators of the new code were tried for polygamy, bride price and so on.

In section 3.1.3 of this chapter I have examined the 'mobility' of the Zhenotdels of Central Asia, particularly of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where most of the population prior to the Soviet government was nomadic. The Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, too, had to develop its own strategies of working with and reaching out to nomadic populations of Kyrgyzstan, and this is why the archival documents of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930 mention numerous times mobile *red yurts*, portable movie screeners, and so on.

Moreover, in sections 3.2 and 3.2.1 I have explored the Hujum campaign in Kyrgyzstan and its consequences. The Hujum campaign was launched by the Bolsheviks and the SredAzBuro in 1926 in Uzbekistan, however, the archival documents indicate that the official start of the campaign in Kyrgyzstan was in 1927. The "attack" on the old, feudal and traditional lifestyle was aiming at transforming the people of Central Asia, and *unveiling* was became one the central makers of the campaign. The Hujum was actively carried out in Kyrgyzstan too, however it also had unfortunate consequence such as serious physical harm and even murders.

Chapter Four – The Zhenotdel's interaction with other organizations, and Orientalism

Introduction

This chapter examines the interaction between the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan and the local Communist Party as well as other governmental organizations. Moreover, it discusses the work dynamics within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. In section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 of this chapter I will examine the relationship between the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other political organizations. This chapter addresses following questions: What does an analysis of the archival documents of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan show about its relationship with the local branch of the Communist Party and with other political organizations? What negative and positive encounters and dynamics in their work do the documents discuss or show?

Then, in sections 4.2 and 4.3, I will explore the internal dynamics of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and hierarchies within the organization. Finally, I will discuss Orientalism within the Zhenotdel and how that influenced the work of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

4.1 The relationship between the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and the local Communist Party

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the relationship between the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks and the Women's Department or Zhenotdel was not uniform. At times, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, would really be committed and dedicated to women's emancipation, however, there was resistance towards women's organizing, too. As historian Elizabeth Wood puts it, "Male comrades at the local and national levels were not entirely won over to the idea of separate

organizing for women, however, despite the best efforts of central party authorities and women activists. Again and again organizers of women complained that they heard nothing but resistance and scorn from their male colleagues."[104] Moreover, Wood quotes one of the deputy directors of the women's section, Martynova, who complained that whenever she raised a question regarding the work among women at 9th Party Congresses, "it brings derisive smile to your faces; this smile indicated an attitude toward the organization of this work which will affect its results."[105] Anna Krylova notes the male hostility and resistance, too.

> The help-yourself recommendation became a staple of the department's agitation which singled out the social services sector of dining, child care, schooling and medical care as women's number one priority. Grassroots resistance and hostility of male workers, local party committees, trade union organizations as well as women-delegates' understandable preference to seek assignments in governmental bodies 'closer' to their traditional expertise also played a crucial role.[106]

What both Krylova and Wood are reporting is that at times, there was resistance to women's emancipation expressed in different ways of hostile attitudes and behavior.

The relationship of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan with the local Communist Party branch was not unambiguous either. The archival documents concerning the work among women in Kyrgyzstan, written both by the members of the Zhenotdel and other party officials, do not clearly indicate whether the local branch of the Communist Party and the local Zhenotdel had a good or bad relationship. Perhaps, this is because the archival sources of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan that I have been able to read document more positive than negative experiences. Only

[104] Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 71.
[105] Wood, 71.
[106] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 436.

a few archival documents refer to episodic, negative and positive, encounters between the Party and the Zhenotdel.

4.1.1 – Negative Interaction

One of the pressing issues that the women workers of the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel reported on concerned the work in the Koshchi[107] union. The Koshchi Union was supposed to actively engage in the struggle for women's emancipation through drawing more women into their organization and defending their rights. In a comradely letter written by Yuliya Kryukova and sent to Prigorodova on May 3, 1927, Yuliya Kryukova reported on the situation of the work among women in Karakol, a city in north-eastern part of Kyrgyzstan, and the Zhenotdel. Yuliya Kryukova reported on the problems that the Zhenotdel of Karakol faced, and among other problems, she mentioned the work being done in the Koshchi organization. Kryukova noted that "The Koshchi organization and its work in improving women worker's situation is **deeply sleeping**, and it is quite difficult to wake it." (emphasis in bold mine).[108] The issue was not that the Koshchi members were hostile towards the work among women or the women's emancipation project, but rather that the Koshchi organization was not active, and its members were not fulfilling their duties, that is, involving and engaging more worker women into the social and labor life.

In January 1927 Avgusta Vyboldina, then the head of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, wrote to Yuliya Kryukova, the head of the Osh branch of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. In the six-page long letter Avgusta Vyboldina describes the problems in the work of the Zhenotdel. Avgusta

[107] Koshchi (translate from Uzbek as *hard working and ploughing person*) was a workers' mass union in Soviet Central Asia which was formed in 1920. Initially, the union was formed to unite poor and "middle class" workers and cease the influence of the rich. For more information, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia at http://bse.sci-lib.com/article065534.html

[108] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 983, L. 141, CSA-KR.

Vyboldina had just become the director of the Central Zhenotdel, thus she also notes how new she is both to the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and to the region, that is, Kyrgyzstan.

> "As a newcomer, I am only now learning the work, and everything for me here is new, since I am new to Central Asia. Therefore, I am afraid I won't be able to give you direct orders. However, I have known you, comrade Kryukova, as a serious worker who knows her job. However, I also understand that you are far away from the central government and that it is difficult to navigate such serious work as the work among women, especially that it is all different here, than in the European part of our country. Moreover, what makes it even more difficult is that this whole work is spread out over a vast territory and there are only so much workers and this lack of workers is especially prevalent in Central Asia, but it is not our fault, comrade Kryukova, those are problems that do not entirely depend on us. **The yacheiki still do not understand** the importance of the work among women, especially here in Kirghizia. 'Yesterday's slaves are free citizens today' and they still cannot fully grasp that the party makes the building of socialism a priority in Central Asia and that it depends on the poor, the workers, and on women's emancipation, so that we will all collectively break the old lifestyle […](emphasis in bold is mine)."[109]

From reading this letter, we can infer several problems that the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan was facing in 1927: First, organizing the work among women in Central Asia was difficult for Russian/Slavic activists, for the region was different than the mainland, or, as Avgusta Vyboldina refers to, the "European" parts of the Soviet Union. Secondly, the lack of workers was another vital problem, for the territory, which the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel was responsible for, was vast and there were not many workers due to several reasons including lack of people knowing how to conduct the work, lack of funding. That said, there were many volunteers and many local Kyrgyz, Uzbek or

[109] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 983, L. 27, 28, 29, 30, CSA-KR.

Uighur, and other women who were eager to carry out the work on a voluntary basis, that is, without being paid for it. Thirdly, Avgusta Vyboldina pointed out that the cells (in Russian - *yacheiki)* didn't understand the importance of the work among women. The word "yacheiki," which can mean a unit or a cell, can be referring to a Communist Party cell, or to a unit/cell of another governmental organization, such as Komsomol or Koshchi (union). Regardless of what Vyboldina was exactly referring to, it is important to emphasize that many Zhenotdel members were actively working and understood the problems of their work among women. Moreover, the language of the letter suggests that despite the problems and difficulties, the Zhenotdel was determined to continue and advance the work among women and move towards a common goal, that is, building a socialist community.

Finally, another significant letter was written by Mariya Krizhivenchik on October 22, 1930, and sent to the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, to the State Political Directorate of the Soviet Union, and to the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection in Kyrgyzstan. Mariya Krizhivenchik raised several issues that she faced during her interaction with the Interhelpo and with the women who worked in *Interhelpo*. Interhelpo[110] was a union and cooperative of workers, mainly from Slovakia and Czech Republic, who came to Kyrgyzstan to help build socialism. In other words, it was a group of people who voluntarily came to Kyrgyzstan and helped build houses, roads, etc. Krizhivenchik wrote the following:

[110] Please read more at https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/who-were-the-interhelpo.html

The Zhenotdel
Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
State Political Directorate

Having frequently attending women's meetings at the Interhelpo and after talking to them about their lives, for it is interesting for me to know how they were doing, I became aware of especially pressing two problems:

1) There is nowhere to send or keep the children at during the period of work, therefore, it is important to organize kindergartens and creches.

2) Salaries of women at Interhelpo are very low, and that is a cause of frequent changing of women workers at the factory.

Naturally, I could not shy away from these problems, and therefore I took the risk of voicing them, for none of the women were going to share these problems because of their fear of getting fired. That is why I submitted a request to the Interhelpo cell, where, frankly speaking, I had to "attack" some of the directors […][111]

Krizhivenchik took the risk to voice the problems of the women at Interhelpo despite the fear of becoming a subject for hostility and ill treatment Continuing with her letter, which she addressed to different governmental organizations, she then wrote about the fact that the Interhelpo directorate did not like her letter, and, even more, they accused her of instigating chaos and for having a *counter-revolutionary* ideology. Moreover, she not only wrote about the problems the Interhelpo women were facing, and the difficulties she was experiencing because she brought them up, but also carefully calculated the budget given to the Interhelpo and people's salaries, and concluded that there was enough money to build creches considering the amount of Interhelpo's budget. An interesting point in the same latter is about Krizhivenchik being accused of "scolding communists." *"I asked Shestakova, women's organizer, why I was so reprimanded for my*

[111] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 1002, L. 52, CSA-KR.

criticism, and she responded that 'one cannot scold communists like that.' Is it really so that a small book, proving you belong to the communist party, can save everyone from mistakes? Why cannot we point out the mistakes of people whenever there are some?"[112] In other words, Krizhivenchik was actively raising her concerns and issues, advocating to have the problems of other women addressed as well. Furthermore, she criticized the fact that "communists can't be scolded." This is yet another example of how the women were actively engaged in social and political, everyday lives of the society and were eager to point out to and tackle the problems the activist community was dealing with. They were doing this despite the risks of being ill-treated and accused of being a counterrevolutionary.

So, what can be inferred from these archival documents about the problems the Zhenotdel women were having and about their relationships with other governmental organizations? At a general level, the hostility and bad attitude towards Women's Department and its workers, that Anna Krylova, Elizabeth Wood et al. mention, is not directly visible in the archival documents of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan I could study.[113] Moreover, the Women's Department in Kyrgyzstan was having numerous problems and issues with other state organizations, however, those were concerning other aspects such as the inactivity of the Komsomol or the Koshchi organization, or the fact that the "units will not understand the importance of the work among women," lack of funding and therefore lack of workers, or other institutional problems such as low payment and poor employment opportunities, which were not directly targeting the Zhenotdel, yet caused problems. What

[112] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 1002, L. 52, CSA-KR.

[113] As mentioned on Page 7 of this thesis, I requested from the archives the documents concerning the work of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, I was handed 25 *delos* from the 10th Fond of the archive, that is, the documents of the Kyrgyz Oblast Committee of the All-Soviet Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks from 1924 to 1937.

the excerpts above demonstrate is that there were different problems at different levels, yet, despite all the hardships and difficulties, the Zhenotdel women managed to navigate through it, sometimes successfully and sometimes less, and continued their work and contribution to the building of the Soviet socialism.

4.1.2 – Positive Interaction

Although there were problems in the work and cooperation between the Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan on the one hand, and the local Communist Party and other governmental organizations on the other (as shown in section 4.1.1), they mostly were cooperating quite well and working towards the common goal, that is, building a socialist state. Numerous archival documents prove a positive interaction between the local Communist Party and the Women's Department.[114] This is not to mean that the local Communist Party "emancipated women", but rather that they were supportive of the emancipation movement, and, in most cases, were cooperating and helping to create an environment in which the Women's Department could carry out its work.

One of the ways in which the local Communist Party Committee was expressing its support and commitment was through providing funding for various activities of the Zhenotdel from the common budget. A 1925 report addressed to the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other governmental organizations of Kyrgyzstan, was written by Anna Matrokhina, who was the director of the Pishpek okrug branch of the Zhenotdel. In her report, Anna Matrokhina discusses the 150 rubles which the local Communist Party had allocated to the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan to organize a conference of women.[115] Such examples of the local Party Committee or other

[114] This is also mentioned in following archival documents: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L. 12, 34, 73; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 946, L. 19; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949, L. 1, 3, 19, CSA-KR.
[115] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L. 10, 11, 12, CSA-KR.

organizations allocating money for the Zhenotdel's activities can be found in the archival documents that I have analyzed in my thesis.[116]

Moreover, different sub-organizations within the government such as the Komsomol, the Pioneers, and even the Koshchi organization offered support (even if the latter had been described as "deeply sleeping").[117] The Komsomol members were especially supportive during the Hujum campaign, in fact, most of the women who were the first ones to take their paranjas off were the wives or siblings or relatives of Kyrgyzstan's Komsomol members. Thus, for instance, Avgusta Vyboldina reported about the work among women in the city of Jalal – Abad in 1927: "In Jalal-Abad canton, there were 23 women who took their paranjas off, who are wives of Communist Party members, members of the Komsomol. There have been illustrative trials where a man was sentenced for 8 months of community work for polygamy […]."[118] In other words, if the husbands or parents or siblings of women in any way connected to the local Communist Party, or were involved in state apparatus, they were most likely to encourage women around them to partake in the Hujum, and to actively engage in social and political life of the society. Marianne Kamp notes the same: "Most of the Uzbek women who unveiled before the Hujum worked in state owned workplaces, were students or teachers in state schools, or came from families where there were Party or Komsomol members or Jadids."[119] In other words,, the people who were in any way involved in local government organizations or unions were the most likely to join the emancipation movement. Of course, the state or the Communist Party Committee might have also pressured women to unveil and partake in Hujum, or could pressure women's husbands and ask

[116] Other archival documents also demonstrate this: Fond 10 , Opis 2, Document 945, L. 19; Fond 10 , Opis 2, Document 955, L. 33; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 946, L. 18; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 971, L. 1, CSA-KR.
[117] As mentioned earlier, this is mentioned in following archival documents: Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L. 12, 34, 73; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 946, L. 19; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949, L. 1, 3, 19, CSA-KR.
[118] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 978, L. 62, CSA-KR.
[119] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 146.

them to persuade their wives and sisters to join the Hujum and other activities organized by the government or the Zhenotdel. This is likely to have happened, but I have no material to substantiate such forms of pressure.

Finally, another archival document relevant to the question of cooperation with the Zhenotdel is a *protokol* type of report[120] that was written by a specially designated commission in 1928. That special commission held a session which was titled "Session of the Commission for reviewing the implementation of the directives on women's emancipation."[121] The commission consisted of Nikiforov (unfortunately it was not possible to establish his first name or the position he held) and Turdaly Tokbayev, Head of the People's Commissariat for Education of Kyrgyzstan, and was chaired by Sadeev D., Chairman of the Kyrgyz Oblast Controlling Commission and Worker and Peasant Inspection. Unfortunately, we do not know who installed this special commission and why it was initiated. However, the special commission reviewed and evaluated the work that was being carried out by 42 men who were in key governmental and party positions in Kyrgyzstan. Most importantly, the central question of the evaluation was to what extent these men were committed to the emancipation of women. In other words, the commission examined the work of those 42 men and tried to give a mark depending on the level of their input and dedication to the work of the Zhenotdel in particular, and women's emancipation in general. Among the 42 people whose work was evaluated, there were people like Isakeev Bayaly (Chairman of the Council of People's Commissar, basically - head of the government), Yusupali Abdrakhmanov (Chairman of the People's Council of Commissar), Kasymaly Tynystanov (Minister of Education), Bayalinon (Editor of the National Newspaper), Aaly Tokombayev (Poet

[120] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 280, L. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, CSA-KR.
[121] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 280, L. 4, CSA-KR.

and an Editor), and others. There was a specific criteria by which these men in key governmental positions were checked against: to what extent did they support their wives in joining the party, attending *likbez* schools, actively engaging in social and political life etc., but above all – to what extent were these men dedicated to the cause, that is, to the emancipation movement. The result of the evaluation, which most of the men received, was the mark that said "consider checked", which meant that they had passed the evaluation exam. However, there were few people who were "given one year" to rectify their deeds, for they were neither doing enough for not supporting enough the emancipation movement. In other words, most of the powerful and influential people in power were checked to gauge their engagement in the women's emancipation movement, and this was reviewed by a special commission which consisted of three men, two of whom were the People's Commissar for Education of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz Oblast Controlling Commission and Worker and Peasant Inspection.

4.2 Power hierarchies and dynamics within the Zhenotdel

"The composition of the *okrug* Zhenotdel: the director is *Evropeika* and the instructor is a Tatar woman. No changes happened during the past month" is how Anna Matrokhina's aforementioned 1925 report starts.[122] Her report provided a brief, yet detailed, description of the work of the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel as of January 1925. This opening point in the report matters since it indicates how important it was for the members of the Zhenotdel to mention the ethnicities of women who worked at the Zhenotdel. The indication of the ethnicity was mostly for demonstrating the ethnic demarcation between women: Evropeika on the one hand and the locals on the other. Evropeika, or Evropeiki (plural) is how most of the ethnically Russian, perhaps most

[122] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L. 10, 11, 12, CSA-KR.

of the Slavic, women at the Zhenotdel were referring to themselves as Evropeiki juxtaposed to the *native*, or *local*, or *Muslim woman* categories that were ascribed to the local women in Kyrgyzstan. There is a certain power dynamics and hierarchy behind such choices of words, and it is exactly these power dynamics and hierarchies that this sub-section of the chapter will attempt to unpack.

4.2.1 Moscow – Pishpek/Frunze interaction

In terms of deciding the politics of Central Asia, most of important decisions had usually been made by Moscow. For instance, as we know from Marianne Kamp's book, the decision about launching the Hujum campaign was made by Moscow. "In 1926, the Communist Party leadership in Moscow, with strong input from the Women's Division and from Central Asia Bureau members, decided to launch a campaign that would radically change women's lives."[123] In other words, although the Central Asian Bureau and the Women's Department influenced the decision of official launching of the Hujum campaign, the decision was, after all, made by the Central Party leadership in Moscow. The power hierarchies of the Soviet rule of Central Asia in general, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, and its interaction with the local Women's Department, can be best understood if viewed from a paralleled perspective between the Communist Party, or government in general, on the one hand, and the Women's Department on the other hand. At a higher level, there was a Communist Party leadership in Moscow, which overlooked all over the Soviet Union. The Communist Party leadership itself consisted of different inter-party organizations such as: Politburo of the Communist Party, the Supreme Soviet, and Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, The Council of Ministers and so on.[124] Next in the power hierarchy was the Central Asian Bureau of

[123] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 150.
[124] For more information on the Political structure of the Soviet government, please refer to https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union

Central Committee (*SredAzBuro*) that existed from 1922 until 1934.[125] As Shoshana Keller puts it, this particular organization, that is, the Central Asian Bureau, played a crucial role in centralizing the Soviet and Bolshevik power in the region. "In Central Asia, the CAB received broad instructions from the highest party committees and tailored those instructions to fit regional conditions. It collected information locally and sent it back to Moscow. It organized and disciplined Turkestani party organizations, choosing personnel and setting agendas."[126] Third in the hierarchy of government and power was the local government in Kyrgyzstan, that is, the local party committee, the local Soviets and the local Council of Ministers. On the other hand, the Zhenotdel, established in 1918 as a special department under the Communist Party, also had a similar structure, that is, the Central Zhenotdel in Moscow, then the Zhenotdel of the SredAzBuro and the local Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. In other words, there was a parallel of hierarchies within the Bolshevik government and the Women's Department, which, answered to the local government.

The archival documents of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930 does not show much direct interaction between the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Pishpek/Frunze and Moscow, at least not the documents that I have analyzed for my research. The name of the capital city of Kyrgyzstan was Pishpek until 1926, then it was named Frunze, therefore, in the archival documents, both names are used as to designate the central Zhenotdel of the country. The only document that demonstrates that there had been a direct interaction between the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan and Moscow is the aforementioned (Chapter 3 – section 3.1.1) comradely letter written by the head and other members of the local Zhenotdel and addressed to

[125] Keller, "The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan," 281.
[126] Keller, 282.

Nadezhda Krupskaya.[127] In her comradely letter, then head of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan Khristina Nikonova, asked Nadezhda Krupskaya to help with obtaining movie screener and other materials for the local Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan. In other words, although there were various levels of the governmental organization between Pishpek/Frunze and Moscow, the women of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan did maintain connection with the Central government bodies in Moscow. However, that interaction was not much, but on rare occasions.

4.2.2 Pishpek/Frunze – other regions on Kyrgyzstan

The work dynamics and interaction between the Kirov/Pishpek/Frunze Women's Department, that is, the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and the Zhenotdel of other regions seem to have been more horizontal than vertical. The the archival documents that I have studied for my research demonstrate the interaction between the main and regional Zhenotdels of Kyrgyzstan, and from those documents it can inferred that the communication between the Central and the regional Zhenotdels of Kyrgyzstan was held at an equal stance. However, this is not to say that every Zhenotdel branch was independent and free to do what they wanted, but rather that the Central Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan was mainly directing, advising and recommending the course of action, and periodically requesting reports on the work that was carried out by the regional branches of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan.

The archival documents that I am analyzing for my research contain all different sorts of records that vary from official letters to directives to comradely letters to brief reports and so on. One of such documents is a letter written to Khristina Nikonova by Volyukova in 1926. Volyukova who was a director of the Jalal-Abad regional Zhenotdel, wrote to Khristina Nikonova to report

[127] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 946, L. 201, CSA-KR.

on the course of the work of the Jalal- Abad Zhenotdel, and delegate reelection in particular. Volyukova started her letter with "Greetings comrade Nikonova! I have not written to you in a while because we have been having the delegate reelection campaigns. The campaign is almost over now and the only work left is in the Muslim parts of the city. The delay happened due to the fact that Uzbek women (who comprise the Muslim population) were busy with cotton harvesting […]."[128] Furthermore, towards the end of her letter, Volyukova wrote about herself and requested from Khristina Nikonova that she was freed from her position for she wanted to reunite with her husband in Russia. "Now let me introduce to you the director, that is, myself. I am a young worker without much experience and I feel that I am doing my job poorly. Comrade Kryukova's vacation is about to be over, and she is an old member of the party and has a lot of experience of the work among women (since 21 years-old), is theoretically well prepared, Consequently, she has all the qualifications for this work. Thus, also due to the fact that my husband is in Russia and I want to move to where he lives, I am requesting to let me quit the position of the director of the Zhenotdel which can be taken by comrade Kryukova. With communist greetings, Volyukova."[129] What the excerpt from this letter shows is that the director of the regional Zhenotdel was writing to the head of the Central Zhenotdel, and was introducing the work and herself in the south of the country. Moreover, Volyukova then asked let her to quit the position of the director of the Zhenotdel branch in Jalal – Abad. The style and the language of the letter indicate that the working dynamics and interaction between Khristina Nikonova and Kryukova was friendly and comradely, rather than hierarchical and director/subordinate.

[128] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 971, L. 76, CSA-KR.
[129] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 971, L. 76, CSA-KR.

Another example of such work relations and power dynamics can be read from comradely and work-related 1927 letter written by Avgusta Vyboldina to Gornova who was a director of the Naryn regional branch of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan.

> "Comrade Gornova, all of your letter is full of desperation and hopelessness. My dear comrade, it is hard to work in that region, but if you are appointed to that position by the party, then you ought to put all of your energy into this work and continue it, even if it is tremendously difficult. I have learned from the letters of other comrades the poor situation of the work among women in Naryn, and it might be because you are not well experienced in this work yet and are quite young. But it is all fine, you need to learn, and while you learn from others – you also teach others. You do not say in your letter who is there to help you. You say there is no place to hold delegate meetings. But how about schools? Are the schools not available? Ask the department […]."[130]

From the opening lines of the letter, we can assume that that there was a preceding letter written by Gornova and addressed to Avgusta Vyboldina, and that letter, most likely, had described the problems of the Zhenotdel's work in the Naryn region. Avgusta Vyboldina, in her response, tried to tell Gornova that it was okay, if she felt that the Zhenotdel's work in the Naryn region was not going well. Moreover, Avgusta Vyboldina gave some guidance and directives to Gornova, for example, as to where they could hold delegate meetings and so on.

What the two short, yet informative, excerpts from letters demonstrate is that there was a certain interaction and work dynamics between the workers of the Zhenotdel. That interaction, between the directors of the Central Zhenotdel and other branches throughout the country, was not

[130] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 983, L. 33, 34, CSA-KR.

like between a boss and a subordinate, but rather was of horizontal nature. In other words, the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, as an institutionalized organization, did not operate within hierarchical and vertical power paradigm, but resembled more of a comradely and horizontal organization. However, this is not to mean that there were no supervision or directing, but rather the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan was giving advices and recommendations, and other branches were trying to accomplish the set goals and purposes.

4.3 Orientalism within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan

One of the most important points that needs to be raised while researching the history of Soviet Central Asia is the topic of Orientalism. Both the Soviet politics in Central Asia, and the work of the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel are permeated with different Orientalist stereotypes that were inherited from the times of the tsarist rule of the Russian Empire. These Orientalist tendencies are well documented in the archival records of the work of the Women's Department in Kyrgyzstan as well.

Edwards Said, in his 1978 groundbreaking book *Orientalism* defines Orientalism as [o]rientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles."[131] Moreover, he writes that "Orientalism is style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident. Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for

[131] Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on."[132] In the study of the work of the Women's Department in Central Asia, especially so in the analysis of the interaction between the Russian/Slavic/European women of the Zhenotdel and the local/native women, there is a great deal of Orientalist tendencies from the Russian/Slavic women towards the local/native women. In other words, the specific image and stereotype of the "Eastern woman" is created as opposed to the image of the Russian/European woman.

Two recurring phrases throughout most of the archival documents that I am analyzing in my research are: *Evropeika* and *Muszhenschiny.*[133] Evropeika is how the Russian/Slavic women of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan were referring to themselves juxtaposed to Muszhenschiny, meaning the Muslim women, or local/native/indigenous women.

In an aforementioned report concerning the work of the Central, that is, Pishpek Women's Department, Anna Matrokhina describes the course of the work carried out by the Zhenotdel. The report starts with the list of the workers of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and what ethnicity (*natsionalnost*) did the women of the Zhenotdel belong to.

> "Report of the Pishpek Okrug Zhenotdel on the work among women as of January 1925
>
> 1) The composition of the Okrug Zhenotdel: the director is evropeika, the instructor is tatarka.[134] No changes have happened in the past month.

[132] Said, 3.

[133] *Evropeika/Muslim women/native women* division is also mentioned in following archival document: Fond 10 , Opis 2, Document 945, L. 1, 19; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 946, L. 20; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949, L. 19; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 947, L. 102; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 971, L. 42; Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 96, L. 4, CSA-KR.

[134] A female person who is ethnically Tatar.

> 2) We do not have any paid volost organizers yet, for we do not have a staff yet, there are 3 unpaid workers – 1) In Tokmok – Usmanova Tursun – karakirgizka,[135] 2) In Talas – Silina - evropeika, 3) in Prigorodno-Lebedinskiy - Ergakova – evropeika (wife of Kyrgyz), their work consists of carrying out sovietization campaigns, organizing regional conferences of women who are not members of the party, and of organizing delegate apparatus among karakirgiz women […]."[136]

As we can read from the report, Anna Matrokhina describes the composition of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan as of 1925, and when listing the name of the people, she also gives information as to what ethnicity did the workers of the Zhenotdel belong to. By Evropeika, which literally means an European woman, it is most likely that Anna Matrokhina refers to Russian/Slavic members of the Zhenotdel. Moreover, when she introduces Ergakova, who was a volost organizer of Prigorodno-Lebedinskiy, she also mentions that Ergakova's husband is Kyrgyz. In other words, it was important for the Women's Department to mention and highlight the ethnicity (which in Russian they were referring to as *nationality*) of the members of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, thus distinguishing between evropeikas and the locals.

Although this continuous distinction between the Evropeika and the locals have been mostly about emphasizing the ethnicity of members of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, the reason for mentioning the ethnicity particularly was the abovementioned Orientalist legacy of the tsarist Russian administration in the region. As historian Douglas Northrop puts it, "The Central Asian East was seen as unenlightened and primitive, thus practically begging for the introduction of civilization and progress by a more advanced West (or at least by somewhat more advanced Russia, which had expanded into Central Asia during the nineteenth century). At the same time, the people

[135] Former name of the Kyrgyz people.
[136] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 955, L. 10, 11, 12, CSA-KR.

of Turkestan are depicted as being different from and less than European."[137] In other words, the Russian colonialism in Central Asia, and subsequent Orientalism, are similar to other European colonialism(s), and a similar dynamics were formed, that is, the Central Asia and its people being portrayed as backward and uncivilized and needing to be enlightened by a "more advanced" nation/empire. Although what Northrop refers to has mostly to do with the colonial history of Central Asian countries, that is, from its conquest by the Russian empire in the 18th century, the Orientalist and stereotypical tendencies survived in pretty much everything: from academia to politics to art and to literature. The Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan, which was mostly directed by ethnically Russian/Slavic women, was not an exception. And although the Kyrgyzstani Zhenotdel's work is in no way resembling the imperial/colonial paradigms, it could not get itself far away from Orientalism.

Serafima Lyubimova, who was the director of the Women's Department of the above mentioned SredAzBuro, in her 1924 circular letter titled "Theses for reelections of delegate assemblies among the women of indigenous population"[138] writes: "Thus, for the oppressed and backward women of Turkestan, there opens a new, wider path for cultural development and involvement in creative life of the party and the state [...]."[139] Another 1925 circular letter addressed to the regional Communist Party unit, co-written by the Secretary of the Okrug Communist Committee and Anna Mesheryakova, director of the Kyrgyzstani Women's Department, depicts the local women in a similar way: "[…]Among the organized Muszhenschiny (Muslim women) delegates, there needs to be cultural-educational work conducted; meetings no less than twice a month, and one general meeting of Muszhenschiny once a month[…]."[140] What

[137] Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 35.
[138] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 944 L. 2, 3, CSA-KR.
[139] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 944 L. 2, 3, CSA-KR.
[140] Fond 10, Opis 2, Document 949 L. 19, CSA-KR.

the two excerpts demonstrate is how the local/Muslim/indigenous women of the Central Asia were depicted by the Russian/Slavic directors and other workers of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and local governmental organizations such as the Communist Party Committee of Kyrgyzstan. In other words, it reiterates the Oriental image of Central Asian women once again, that is, backward, oppressed, uneducated and uncultured. This is not to generalize and say that all of the non-local members of the Zhenotdel had this tendency of Orientalizing, nevertheless, such portrayals took place and did so quite often.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the power dynamics and the hierarchies between the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan and other governmental organizations on the one hand, and the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan on the other. Moreover, I have looked at the work dynamics within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

In sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 of this chapter I have examined the negative and positive encounters between the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan and other local state organizations based on archival documents from 1924 to 1930. Based on the study of the documents of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, there were not much negative encounters between the local Zhenotdel and other organizations. Apart from the Koshchi Union not being proactive at times and one occasion in which one of the local women at Interhelpo was reprimanded for "scolding communists". That said, there were numerous occasions in which there was a positive interaction between the local Communist Party and the Zhenotdel, such as various sub-organizations being helpful and proactive, allocating separate funding for the Zhenotdel and so on.

In section 4.2 of this chapter I explore the power hierarchies and work dynamics within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. As per Moscow and Pishpek/Frunze interaction, there was not much information on that, at least not in the documents I have studied for my research, other than one time when the head and other members of the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan wrote a letter to Nadezhda Krupskaya asking for a help. As per the interaction between the Central Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other branches throughout the country, the archival documents demonstrate that the work dynamics and interaction were more of a horizontal and comradely, rather than vertical and hierarchical.

Finally, in section 4.3 of this chapter I discuss Orientalism in the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, particularly about the Evropeika and Muszhenschiny division and how Oriental tendencies, inherited from the colonial/tsarist times, permeated and influenced the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the archival documents of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. I have particularly tried to find answers to questions such as: How did the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan conduct its work? Was the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan different from that of the Zhenotdel in Russia, and if so, in what ways was it different? What was the relationship between the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other local political organizations? What were the work dynamics of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan?

In **Chapter 1** of this thesis I have discussed the two theoretical frameworks I have used in my research. The first was a critique of the *top-down* or *totalitarian* approach in "traditional Sovietology". That is, as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Lynne Viola have described, viewing the Soviet Union and its history as a top-down, monolithic entity governed by ideology and terror. As a result of Cold War scholarship, the totalitarian or top-down approach has been quite dominant until the 1980s, when a new approach began to develop, later called "revisionism." Secondly, I have discussed Edward Said's Orientalism and how that can be applied to the study of history of Soviet Central Asia in general, and women's emancipation movement in particular. I also discussed the methodology I have used in my research and explored different methods used by scholars such as Marianne Kamp, Malgorzata Fidelis and Antoinette Burton. I concluded Chapter 1 with discussion of limitations of my research and methodology.

In **Chapter 2** I have explored and analyzed major scholarly works in the field of Soviet history, Central Asian history and the Bolsheviks' initial ideology of gender and women's emancipation. First, I have examined the ways in which scholars wrote about the Soviet politics of gender and the Zhenotdel. Then, I have explored what the scholars have written about the Soviet politics in Central Asia, including gender politics during the earlier years of the Soviet government.

Finally, I have connected the literature to my research, which enabled me to pose following questions: how did the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel conduct its work? Was its work different from that of the Zhenotdel in mainland Russia? What were the ways in which the Hujum ("attack") campaign was carried out in Kyrgyzstan? Moreover, can Soviet orientalism and imperialism be traced in the archival documents? What were the power hierarchies and dynamic in the local Zhenotdel in Kyrgyzstan?

In **Chapter 3** of this thesis, I have studied the ways in which the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan was different from that of the Zhenotdel in mainland Russia. First I have explored how the specific discourse of the "Soviet East" was created and how that was reiterated in the work of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan. In other words, the understanding of Kyrgyzstan as part of a "Soviet East" made a categorical difference in the work of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, and resulted in the use of different approaches to be developed to carry out the women's emancipation project in Kyrgyzstan. Then, I explored the ways in which the Soviet Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship was implemented in Kyrgyzstan. One of the differences of the work of Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan was that their work focused on tackling the issues of marriage of young girls, coercive marriages and the bride-price. Obviously, these were not the only problems that women in Kyrgyzstan experienced, but they were the issues the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan prioritized, as the Department's archival documents from 1924 to 1930 demonstrate. Furthermore, one of the ways in which the Kyrgyz Zhenotdel had to adapt to the local situation was by taking into account the nomadic lifestyle of the population, therefore integrate a form of mobility in the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan, as discussed in section 3.1.3. Finally, the sections 3.2 and 3.2.1 have explored the ways in which the Hujum campaign was carried out in Kyrgyzstan, the

local Zhenotdel's active participation in it, and some of the difficulties as well as negative consequences that the campaign had in Kyrgyzstan.

In **Chapter 4** I have explored the relationship between the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and the local Communist Party as well as other governmental organizations. Moreover, I have looked at the internal hierarchies and work dynamics within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930. In the first section I have discussed the negative interactions between the Zhenotdel and other political organizations in Kyrgyzstan. On the basis of my reading of the archival documents I concluded that there have not been many negative encounters between the Zhenotdel and other local organizations, such as the Komsomol, the Koshchi Union, and the Communist Party. There were, however, a few occasions in which negative experiences were discussed, such the case of the Koshchi Union not being proactive enough and one of the local women getting reprimanded for "scolding the communists." In the second section I discussed examples of positive interactions between the Zhenotdel and other local, governmental organizations. The local Communist Party paid great attention to the implementation of the new legislation, as well to the women's emancipation movement more broadly. There were specific funds allocated, conferences organized, illustrative trials against those who violated the new legislations, etc. The Kyrgyz Zhenotdel archival sources that I have been able to read document more positive than negative experiences. The Kyrgyz Zhenotdel archival documents from 1924 to 1930 indicate that there generally has been more positive than negative interaction.

In sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 I examined the internal work dynamic and the hierarchies of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. As the archival documents which I have looked at show, there was not much direct interaction between Moscow, that is, the Central Zhenotdel, and the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, the archival documents of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan clearly

demonstrate that the internal work dynamics within the Zhenotdel were primarily of a horizontal and comradely nature, rather than a vertical hierarchy. Finally, in section 4.3, I have explored the topic of Orientalism within the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan from 1924 to 1930, finding that Orientalism and the category of the "Woman of the East", inherited from the tsarist, colonial administration and appropriated by the Bolsheviks, permeated the work of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan and other governmental organizations.

Overall, my thesis has allowed me to rethink the main issues in the scholarly literature along the following lines. First, there is not much research on the topic of the women's emancipation movement in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. Second, even if there is scholarly literature, it is mostly described in a top-down manner, in which the state is portrayed as the main and central actor. Finally, the active participation of women of Kyrgyzstan in the emancipation movement and their tremendous contribution to the building of socialism are often left unnoticed.

Regarding follow-up research, it would be important to explore more and write about the places in Kyrgyzstan where there were Zhenotdel branches and the women who were members of the Women's Department of Kyrgyzstan. As a starting point, one could create an interactive map of all the Zhenotdels of Kyrgyzstan and write a biographical encyclopedia of the workers of the Zhenotdel of Kyrgyzstan. This is something I have always wanted to do, and hope to do in the future, as there is so little knowledge about the women who actively worked for and contributed to the women's emancipation movement and the building of socialism. Also, comparative research could be done between other Zhenotdels of Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in order to find out more about the ways in which the Zhenotdels of Central Asian countries operated and conducted their work.

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