PERESTROIKA IN CENTRAL ASIA: TRANSFORMING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN AND NATION IN 1985-1991 IN THE KYRGYZ AND UZBEK SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS' PRESS

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Abstract

This thesis explores changes in the representation of women and their roles in the Kyrgyz and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics during Perestroika (1985-1991) in two republican women's journals and other relevant press, with a focus on labor and nation as two most discussed topics. According to the findings, during the early Perestroika years (1985-1989), Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's journals repeated the earlier Soviet image of a woman as a working mother balancing labor and family. Periodicals also urged their readers to acknowledge the achievements of the Soviet state and utilized the stories of successful women as role models. In this period, Kyrgyz and Uzbek women were primarily depicted as agricultural workers, in keeping with the Soviet state's agenda in Central Asia to be an agricultural region. The challenges at work were depicted as hardship to be overcome by women's persistence and dedication, rather than a gap between the state promise and reality. This depiction differs from women's periodicals in Moscow, which have criticized the state for failing to support women.

The representation of women changed from 1990 with the enactment of laws on the "protection of motherhood and children" and a broader shift towards a family-centered policy in Moscow. Women in Kyrgyz and Uzbek periodicals and newspapers began to be portrayed as "primarily mothers." At the same time, with the introduction of Glasnost reforms and demokratizatsia policy, the state censorship was abolished and criticism of state began to emerge. Journals highlighted difficult working conditions in the cotton and tobacco industry as well as in textile factories, to demonstrate how women reacted to economic and political problems. From exploitative labor in the cotton fields, corruption and excessively high state plans coupled with the societal expectations, some women in rural Uzbekistan committed subside by setting themselves on fire. Other women, such as those working in the cocoon sector with little payment which demanded the involvement of all members of the family, chose *shukur*, which implies being content with what you have. There were other women who tried to use the emerging political opportunities and became delegates to Moscow, where they voiced the concerns of women from their communities. Finally, there were women who became entrepreneurs in the emerging market. Periodicals demonstrated varied and different reactions of women and their agency amid societal changes, in contrast to the literature on late Soviet and early independence years describing women as "lost voices" in the "retraditionalizing" Central Asian societies.

After the abolishment of the state censorship, discussions about the Kyrgyz and Uzbek nations and women's roles in shaping and passing on national customs arose. Periodicals and the newspapers portrayed women primarily as mothers reproducing the nation, implying "freeing women from exploitative work." Similarly, to how the Soviet state used "women's emancipation" to advance political agenda, emerging national projects put women at the center of their discourses. Some women supported these sentiments, but they did so by reflecting on their Soviet experiences and negating stereotypes of women being passive or victims.

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Introduction

The late 1980s reforms in the Soviet Union initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, the first secretary of the Communist Party, known as *Perestroika* (restructuring) and Glasnost (openness), aimed at improving the stagnating Soviet economy and introducing democratic principles, led to turbulent times and opened the door to a wide range of public debates. These reforms ended with the emergence of new nation-states in Central Asia, as in other parts of the former Union. The growing body of scholarship on the impact of these changes on Central Asian societies characterizes the late Soviet years as a period of "social and economic collapse"[1] as well as a period of "rising nationalism,"[2] while others argue for "unexpected independence."[3] While the early stages of perestroika in Central Asia were slow and uncertain, the overall impact of the reforms was transformative, causing both hope and dread, as they did elsewhere in the Soviet Union.[4] Most of the studies primarily focus on the post-independence period, emphasizing the "conservative turn" and "re-traditionalization" in which women are often portrayed as "losing the status obtained during the Soviet times" and becoming "lost voices" embracing motherhood over labor.[5] These depictions overlook the public discourses that emerged during Perestroika, including the depictions of women's roles in the changing society.

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[1] Isaac McKean Scarborough, "The Extremes It Takes to Survive: Tajikistan and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985---1992" (London, London School of Economics, 2018), 11.

[2] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[3] For example, Isaac I. Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost: Viewpoints from the Soviet Press* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1990).

[4] Artemy Kalinovsky, "Prizyvniki Socializma: Tadjikskaya Intelligentsia I Dekolonizatsiya Po-Sovetski," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 2020, 140.

[5]Works on retraditionalization include, Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes, *Lost Voices : Central Asian Women Confronting Transition* (Zed Books, 2005)., Negar Elodie Behzadi and Lucia Direnberger, "Gender and Ethnicity in the Soviet Muslim Peripheries: A Feminist Postcolonial Geography of Women's Work in the Tajik SSR (1950–1991)," *Central Asian Survey* 39, no. 2 (2020): 202–19; Judith Beyer and Peter Finke, "Practices of Traditionalization in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (2019): 310–28.

Other groups of scholars commenting on the collapse of the Soviet Union contest reasons for the demise due to "inherited structural insufficiencies of the command economy," "the paradigm shift within the Party leadership," and "Perestroika reforms ran out of control." More recently, however, Vladislav M. Zubok argued that "Gorbachev sacrificed the Soviet empire to bring the Soviet Union closer to the West, which turned out to be wildly unpopular among the party elite."[6]

To deepen our understanding of the impact of the Perestroika reforms on the societies in the periphery as well as the general dynamics of the time contributing to the collapse, it is useful to study the Soviet press of the time. The press has been both an instrument of the state to promote and shape socialist ideals among the general public as well as a way to convey messages, values and norms in the Soviet Union.[7] Thus, in this study, I aim to analyze the Central Asian press to trace the changes that occurred during the Perestroika, with a special focus on women's depiction. I chose to study how women were portrayed because "the woman question," as the advancement of women's rights and their public presence, was central to the Soviet rule in Central Asia, while the new nation-states promote a gendered nation building. They imagine women as mothers of the nation who (re)produce and pass down cultural practices to new generations. As beautifully put by Shahnoza Nozima in the case of Tajik women, they now "have to bear, rear, and wear the Tajik nation."[8]

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[6] Rósa Magnúsdóttir, "Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary, and: For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War, and: A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev (Review)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, no. 1 (2010): 201–11.

[7] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (1996): 78–105.

[8] Shahnoza Nozimova, "Imagined Women: Bearing, Rearing and Wearing the Tajik Nation," *Central Asian Affairs*, no. 9 (2022): 134.

In my study, I look into women's magazines and local newspapers published in Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages, as well as a selected number of Russian language and Moscow-based newspapers from the Perestroika years (1985-1991) to study Uzbek and Kyrgyz women's depictions. I analyze the representation of women's roles in magazines, and the ways economic, political, and societal changes have impacted these depictions. My aim is to trace continuities and discontinuities in the representation of women's roles as well as the ways the local press revised the meaning of labor and nation as two main topics discussed in the journals. The questions to answer are: *How did women´s periodicals represent women´s roles in the Kyrgyz and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics during Perestroika? How did the rising "national question" in the context of economic and political changes influence representations of Uzbek and Kyrgyz women's roles? Did the representation of women change? If so, when and how?*

I focus on local periodicals for women, such as *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* (Women of Kyrgyzstan), a monthly Kyrgyz language thematic magazine for women published from 1950 to 1998 in Bishkek (formerly Pishpek/Frunze), *Saodat* (Contentment, Happiness), another women's magazine, established in 1920 under the title *Yangi Yo'l* (New Path), which stopped and resumed as *Uzbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* (Women and Girls of Uzbekistan) in 1950-1953 and continues to be published in Tashkent in the Uzbek language. I reviewed a total of 84 issues of *Saodat* with 30 pages per issue and 84 issues of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* with 24-26 pages per issue. I closely read all the articles concerning women's labor and topics about the nation (ethnicity/nationality as these words were used interchangeably), which were about ethnic (pre-Soviet) history, (forgotten) customs and values, and the rising status of Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages among the native population. In addition to women's magazines, I closely read 20 articles about women in an Uzbek-language newspaper, *Lenin Yo'li,* from multi-ethnic Osh, Kyrgyzstan, as it exemplifies the model

of a multi-ethnic Soviet Central Asian city. Lastly, I closely read 35 articles in the Moscow-based Russian language press *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Komsomol Truth), *Selskaya Industria* (Rural Industry), *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker), and *Pravda Vostoka (The Truth of the East),* a Tashkent-based Russian language newspaper, and the English language monitoring reports of Radio Free Europe in the Blinken Open Society Archives covering relevant topics from 1988 to 1991.

In the last thirty years, historians have rightly established the importance of studying "public letter-writing," a culture widespread in the Soviet Union.[9] Ordinary people writing letters to editors of journals and authorities was a way to express opinions, communicate complaints, and engage with the authorities in the absence of democratic institutions.[10] However, it is important to note that letters sent to editors went through stages of careful selection before they came "to represent the public's opinion." With this limitation said, letters remain one of the few available sources to think of the variety of opinions that existed in the Soviet Union. They are especially noteworthy during the Perestroika years, as these were the years when the Soviet press enjoyed the most freedom under the banner of Glasnost, which was enabled by shifting censorship at the Moscow level.

I was not able to find much information about the editors of the journals and their readers, apart from the magazines mentioned. As one of the initial editors, Gulzhan Muratalieva, put her experience of working at *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* in an interview dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the magazine: "It was the first magazine protecting the equality and freedom of women in our country," and "one of the important tasks was to involve women and girls in modernization and increase the number of working women in the country."[11] The magazine was a part of the socialist

[9] Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s," 79.

[10] Andrew Buck, "Letter Writing as Public Opinion: Complaining to Soviet Authorities.," *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, January 2019, 26.

[11] A. Haydarova, "Byyyl 'Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary' jurnalyna 40 Jyl," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, January 1991, 3.

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education of women, which was "recruiting" women but also "guiding" them in socialist realities to make the best of them. In the initial years after it was established, according to Muratalieva, editors traveled regularly to rural areas to encourage women to get higher education, join industrial work in the capital, and contribute to modernizing Kyrgyz society. They would place photographs of working women on the cover pages and write their success stories to attract more readers.

Throughout its operation, *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* interviewed many prominent figures from the country, including veterans of the women's movement, famous artists, and writers like Chyngyz Aitmatov "to raise the 'culturedness' [*madaniy dengelin*] of its readers."[12] Education and involvement of women in theatrical activities were seen as necessary preconditions for "culturedness," which was another mission the journal aimed at achieving.

The journal had an *Editor's Corner* column dedicated to publishing letters from readers. As one of the editors, Dyushokan Mukambetova, argued, "it demonstrated the trust readers of the magazine had as they shared their *aryz-armandar* (concerns and unfulfilled dreams) that they could not discuss with family members but wanted to make public and sought advice on." While it is hard to test "readers' trust" in the early years of the journal's history, this seems to be a valid point for the late Perestroika years. Thus, Jypar A., a twenty-seven-year-old *kelin* (bride) from Frunze, wrote about her experience studying at the university after being told several times it was better to study *zaochno* (in absentia/extramurally) in order not to be late or miss classes. She was ready to give up but decided to ask, *Can't Kelins Study?*[13] In her reply published on the pages of the journal, Mukambetova encouraged Jypar to carry on her endeavors by giving examples of people who succeeded despite having similar challenges.[14] While their published interactions do not represent

[12] "Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary 40 Jashta," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, March 1991, 5.
[13] Jypar A., "Kelinder Okusa Bolboybu?," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, February 1991, 21.
[14] Jypar A., 21.

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the overall picture of women's issues, which is not the aim of this study, published letters, interviews, and narrations of and about women provide us with a glimpse into their lives in the Perestroika years, based on which I draw my conclusions.

Saodat, the Uzbek language newspaper based in Tashkent, remains the oldest functioning magazine for women in Uzbekistan. In the period I studied, each issue was published in a total of over one million copies, which shows how widely read the magazine was. Women edited *Saodat*, and well-known Uzbek poets and authors frequently provided interviews or articles for the publication. Examples of which include Halima Xudoyberdieva, Muhammad Yusuf, and Muhammad Solih. Members of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan regularly commented on social and economic issues on the pages of *Saodat*. The topics of the Perestroika years covered a wide range of topics, including women's roles in relation to labor and nation, education, motherhood and family, health and childcare, morality, and widespread cases of self-emulation in Uzbekistan. In the same way as *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, they aimed at raising the "culturedness" level of women as well as portraying their concerns with the aim of helping them solve them. Cultural topics were regularly covered in both magazines.

From 1990 on, reporters of both journals started conducting investigative journalism somewhat late compared to their fellow journalists in the European part of the Union. Yet, we do not get the "complaints" or "concerns" of women whose letters were not published or who did not write to the editors due to some reasons, but only the "chosen" ones, i.e., accounts of women and sometimes men, whose letters made their way to the pages of the magazine. Untold stories hint at the priorities and according to which cultural values and norms these editors operated. A detailed analysis of both women's magazines topics in earlier periods, namely the 1950s and 1960s, is provided in the subsection on the scholarship of the press in the Literature Review Chapter.

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I use discourse analysis to study the texts published in the above mentioned press. According to Jorgensen and Phillips, discourse analysis is a research method to study the use of language in social contexts and explore how language constructs and influences social realities.[15] It involves examining various aspects of discourse, going beyond words and sentences to analyze broader patterns and structures of communication to uncover implicit assumptions or ideologies in the text. Discourse analysis also considers the historical and cultural contexts that shape how discourse is understood and interpreted.[16] This approach allows us to study not only the written language but also the silence in the sources - things that have been left out. Lastly, in a broader sense, by analyzing the language of the Central Asian press, I trace the creation of gendered norms and practices.[17] This in turn creates an overview of how Soviet discourse on gender and nation (nationality/ethnicity) locally was constructed or deconstructed at the verge of Soviet collapse.

Chapters overview

My thesis' chapters are organized around the study of (1) a summary of literature on Central Asian women throughout the Soviet era, review of the importance of press in the Soviet Union and the concept of nationalism in relation to women as well as a review of Perestroika's impacts on Central Asia (2) an analysis of the representation of labor in women's lives and the ways this representation changed in the last two years of Perestroika and Glasnost; and (3) the national question re-emerged in the context of political change that allocated different roles to women. This was triggered by the *demokratizatsiya* (democratization) policies adopted in 1990 on top of the economic restructuring policies from 1985.

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[15] Marianne Jorgensen and Loise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), 7.

[16] Jorgensen and Phillips, 7.

[17] Lucy Caton, "Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials," *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, December 18, 2019, 7.

Chapter II analyzes the discussions of labor as an example of the most widely discussed topic in the magazines. The chapter is organized into two big sections, the early Perestroika years and the late Perestroika years, in accordance with the change in the representation of women and labor. Early Perestroika depicted women reproducing the earlier idealized images of Soviet Central Asian women as content, emancipated worker mothers balancing labor and motherhood. They celebrate the achievements of individual successful women by publishing their personal narratives and interviews, in which they tell the story of their challenging path in overcoming patriarchal norms to finally free themselves. Two subsections in this section are dedicated to analyzing the discourse in "acknowledging the socialist achievements" and "balancing labor with motherhood." The reproduction of the earlier image of Soviet women continued until 1990, when the depiction of women's lives acquired a critical tone. With most Central Asian women involved in the agricultural sector, severe working conditions in cotton and tobacco fields, cocoon production, and the textile industry were causing considerable health problems, both because of the devastating working conditions and ecological problems following the uncontrolled use of chemicals in the fields. In 1990, *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* and *Saodat* started publishing articles that can be categorized as early cases of investigative journalism. Additionally, letters to the editors published also received a critical tone. While state criticism has long been established in Moscow-based women's magazines, with dissident women establishing underground literature during Perestroika, criticism in the Central Asian women's press came comparably late. With an insufficient number of health facilities, especially in rural areas, rising hyperinflation, ecological consequences of cotton monoculture, and exploitation of women in the cotton fields, accompanied by rising cases of self-immolation in Uzbekistan, *Saodat* started publishing letters of complaints and interviewing authorities involved in agriculture, as well as representatives of women' committees and

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oppositional leaders regularly. The overall depiction was gloomy, with labor increasingly being associated with hardship. Depictions varied as the reactions to the changes were different, some women expressed their discontent in their letters to editors as this was one of the widespread options to communicate concerns, others, especially women in the state organs who made their way to Moscow as delegates and deputies under the *demokratizatsiya* policies, pushed for the rights of Uzbek and Kyrgyz women within the new law "on the protection of family and motherhood". Yet there were women who opted for *shukur* (contentment) and *sabr* (endurance) according to the cultural norm and societal expectations of women to withstand the hardships. Sometimes, the despair was such that women self-immolated, with about 200 cases in 1988.

Chapter III analyzes the discourses on nations most often described as "restoring the national heritage" in magazines and newspapers. These discussions were about raising the status of national celebrations and integrating them into Soviet holidays, as well as recovering the forgotten history of pre-Soviet times, rewriting the Socialist standardized history from the perspective of the native population, and restoring the image of the victims of Stalinist repressions and the right to religious freedom. Restoring the national heritage in this context meant raising the status of native culture to the level of Sovietness and reevaluating native practices and values as positive and not "backward." Unstable times and the shattering of socialist ideology caused the Soviet-created institutional category of ethnicity to become a uniting principle for people. Magazines and the press constructed gendered images of the emerging sovereign states, allocating women the role of reproducing the nation, passing down the cultural values that are reflected in the discussions on women's behavior, and conveying moral expectations.

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Chapter 1 Literature review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature on the Soviet experiences of Central Asian women in chronological order, drawing from the existing literature I was able to access. I start with studies on early emancipation campaigns in the late 1920s, then move on to publications on Central Asian women in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1980s. I will identify the gap in studies of the Perestroika period as well as the fact that some groups of women were understudied.

Historical Context to the "Woman Question" in Soviet Central Asia

The discourses and cultural codes in Central Asia deriving from specific sociocultural circumstances in Muslim patriarchal society, which underwent rapid change throughout the Soviet era, necessitate the contextualization of Perestroika discourses on the role women played in society in a broader Soviet discourse of the "woman question."

From the early years of Bolshevik rule, women in Central Asia were regarded as an important component in transforming the religious and patriarchal society into a socialist one. The aim, therefore, became to emancipate women, known as "the woman question," and fully immerse them in public life with the aim of encouraging women to participate in building a communist society. This entailed changing the Islamic social fabric and educating women in a secular educational system. Despite facing initial resistance from the conservative levels of population in the region, the call for universal education resonated with Muslim reformists known as *jadids,* who teamed up with the Bolsheviks.[18] A small number of urban Uzbek women *jadids* played a

[18] Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Jackson School Publications in International Studies (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2010).

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significant role in the *hujum* campaign of the late 1920s (abolishing *paranjas,* traditional clothing to cover women's faces worn mostly by women in urban sedentary communities) and advancing women's emancipation. Similar efforts were carried out among Kazakh and Kyrgyz women with the abolishment of *kalym* (a ransom for the bride) and/or bride-kidnapping. Other changes included the elimination of polygyny and setting the minimum marriage age at 18 for men and 16 for women, respectively. The Bolsheviks' cooperation with the Jadids was short due to differences in their visions of reforms in Central Asia. Jadids pioneered advocating for reform in education and promoted girls' education, but did so within the reformist movements in the Muslim world, whereas the Soviet state was against it. The Bolshevik Party appropriated Jadids´ approach of promoting women's education for the purposes of women building industrial societies and communism equally with men. The religion was prohibited as *bytovye prestupleniia* (way of life crimes).[19] The Party suspended the *shari'a* court system, which was in force among sedentary populations, and the *adat* (customary law) practiced in the nomadic areas already in the early 1920s.

Cold War period studies of the "woman question" in Central Asia were characterized by a top-down approach that described the emancipation campaign of the late 1920s as a state-run campaign imposed on Central Asian society against its will. Gregory J. Massell was a widely cited American historian on this topic, and some scholars are still adopting his approach.[20] He coined the term "surrogate proletariat" for Central Asian women, as for the party they represented the most humiliated people in the absence of the indigenous working class.[21] Other scholars, like

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[19] Marianne Kamp, "The Soviet Legacy and Women's Rights in Central Asia," *Current History* 115, no. 783 (2016): 274.

[20] Some scholars who adopted his approach are Shirn Akiner (1997), Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes (2005)

[21] Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Prinston: Princeton University Press, 1974), 5.

Douglas Northrop, argue that in the 1920s, the Party defined the new Uzbek nation through the distinctive patterns of female seclusion (in the form of veiling) and *byt* (traditional way of life), but denounced the same patterns as primitive and oppressive, thus making it impossible to be Uzbek and Soviet at the same time. [22] He argues this was the reason for the failure of gender relations' transformations in the 1920s and 1930s.[23] However, interpreting national identity through veiling distorts the overall conditions of women in the region. Only women in urban communities veiled themselves, whereas the majority, living in rural areas, enjoyed more freedom and thus would not identify themselves with *paranja*.[24]

Starting in the late 1990s, a new approach to studying Central Asia emerged in the works of so-called revisionist scholars. Marianne Kamp is one of the most notable historians of women's history in Uzbekistan and broader Central Asia. Utilizing Uzbek language publications and interviews with women who participated in the *hujum* campaign, she found out that a tragic backlash with over a thousand women being killed by their close male peers was primarily a result of the conflict between modernizing Uzbeks and patriarchal elites.[25]

To date, women's experiences of *hujum* during the early period of Bolshevik rule remain the most studied period in the history of Soviet times for Central Asian women. Studies on the role of local actors in shaping the Bolsheviks' approach during the early formation years of the Soviet Union are growing, with many scholars concluding that Central Asians had an important role in

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[22] D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, Cornell Paperbacks (Cornell University Press, 2004), 115.

[23] Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire : Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, n.d.), 115.

[24] Akim Elnazarov, "Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia by Douglas Northrop," *Ab Imperio* 2004, no. 3 (2004): 597, https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2004.0146.

[25] 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), 300.

shaping the Communist Party's approach to the region.[26] However, the post-war years up until the collapse of the Soviet Union have remained relatively understudied. Below, I will review the available studies covering later periods of the Soviet Union.

In the 1940s, literacy levels were raised all across Central Asia, with women getting enrolled in collective farms. During World War II, Uzbek women went through another wave of turbulent transformations. "Emancipation of necessity" emerged in the condition of massive mobilization, evacuated defense factories and newly built plants in need of workers, agricultural products in urgent need with instances of starvation and with nearly over a million evacuees from the European part of the Union which led Uzbek women to replace men in mechanized agriculture and take leadership positions in kolkhozes.[27] Not only did traditional gender roles change, but Uzbek women started "acting" Soviet as a result of the transformations the war brought.[28]

From the 1950s on, Central Asian women were touted as a result of successful modernization efforts, for they were granted equal rights and access to education. At the same time, the official rhetoric "stressed the inherent differences between men and women, teaching that motherhood was a woman's socialist duty." [29] Nonetheless, parents "rarely allowed daughters to leave home to pursue higher education and remained deeply involved in choosing whom and when their children (both sons and daughters) would marry."[30] Due to these reasons, "the woman question" was central to the party in Central Asia, where local branches of the *Zhenotdel* (Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party) were not shut down even after Stalin

[26] Adrienne Lynn Edgar, "Marriage, Modernity, and the 'Friendship of Nations': Interethnic Intimacy in Post-War Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 581–99.

[27] Charles David Shaw, "Making Ivan-Uzbek: War, Friendship of the Peoples, and the Creation of Soviet Uzbekistan, 1941-1945" (UC Berkeley, 2015), 69.

[28] Shaw, 71.

[29] Kamp, "The Soviet Legacy and Women's Rights in Central Asia," 271.

[30] Kamp, 271.

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declared it solved. The section was renamed as Women's Councils in 1938 and continues to function under the independent states today under the title Women's Committees. The role of the Women's Section was crucial in transmitting Soviet ideology and creating Soviet norms in Central Asian society.

The achievements of the Soviet state in the field of education were significant, as the literacy rate for women went up to 86.7% in Uzbekistan and 84.2% [31] in Kyrgyzstan in 1989, compared to 5% at the time of the emancipation campaign in 1926.[32] Although the region stayed behind the European parts of the Union throughout the Soviet era and achievements varied immensely between rural and urban areas, increased female participation in the labor force (up to 47% in 1989[33]) was also enabled due to the establishment of social welfare services with a childcare system, a healthcare system, and a housing system. Institutions supporting the cultural and artistic endeavors of women were among the other achievements women came to enjoy under Soviet rule in Central Asia.

The consumerist culture that emerged in the 1960s reflected the fusion of Soviet citizenship with national values. Kathryn Dooley argues that this intermingling is well reflected in consumerist culture, with ethnic group-specific products emerging in the 1960s.[34] When it comes to religious practices, as put by Gillian Tett in researching a Tajik rural community in the 1980s, although women may often seem to have had less prestige and visibility than men in the religious life of Muslim communities, it had been the women rather than the men who had been the main

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[31] Statisticheskie ejegodnik, "Narodnoe khozyaistvo v Kirgizskoe SSR v 1989 g.," Annual Statistics (Frunze: State Statistics Committee of KSSR, 1991), 46.

[32] "Education, Soviet Union Information Bureau," *Soviet History Archive*, 1929, www.marxist.org.

[33] Narodnoe khozyaistvo v UZSSR/KRSSR v 1989 g.

[34] Kathryn Amelia Dooley, "Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference: Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945-1985" (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard, 2016), 406.

"guardians" of Islam in the community historically.[35] Studies on the role of women in shaping and transmitting national values of ethnicity throughout the Soviet period reveal that traditional values transmitted included symbolic features of difference from other groups, as well as the uniqueness of each ethnic group. This was a way to raise Soviet citizens with national self-understanding.

Literature on the last five years of the Soviet Union and the effects of loosening state control on Central Asian societies remains scarce. One important work to mention is Marianne Kamp's *Three Lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek,* and *Survivor* in the Oral History Review journal. Kamp discusses the life of Saodat Shamsieva, an Uzbek woman from the early Soviet years until independence, studying her published interviews, personal party files, and an oral history account she conducted in the early 2000s. She argues that with the emergence of "new Uzbek nationalism" during the Perestroika years, "the Party, formerly the object of devotion, became at best an instrument for nation-building and at worst the destroyer of the nation's sons and daughters."[36]

That being said, most studies of Central Asian women during the Soviet years as a whole are primarily focused on women in Uzbekistan, with some work on women in Tajikistan. There is very limited scholarly work about the Soviet experience of Kyrgyz and Kazakh women or minority women in either of the republics. One of the few works on Kyrgyz women is Aisuluu Namasbek Kyzy's study of the representation of Kyrgyz women in *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*. I will review her work in the below subsection on the role of the press. Recently, some work by local historians in the Russian language has been published. One can note Uzbek historian Dilorom Alimova, who

[35] Gillian Tett, "'Guardians of the Faith?': Gender and Religion in an (Ex) Soviet Tajik Village," in *Muslim Women's Choices* (Routledge, 1994), 146.

[36] Marianne R. Kamp, "Three Lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek, Survivor," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 43.

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has studied social and political issues affecting Uzbek women under Soviet rule;[37] Kyrgyz historian Anara Tabyshalieva who studied the changing status of Central Asian women from the Tsarist to late Soviet years;[38] and Zhanat Kundakbaeva on the *Modernization of the Early Soviet Era in the Fates of Women in Kazakhstan*.[39]

The above review established gaps in the literature on the Soviet experiences of Central Asian women. Namely, there is limited work on the Perestroika experiences of women, and the Soviet experiences of Kyrgyz and Kazakh women are understudied. I aim to contribute to filling this gap by studying Uzbek and Kyrgyz women during Perestroika, as I speak these two languages.

Studies on the Representation of the Soviet Woman in the Press

In the early years of the Soviet Union, the print media was seen as the primary channel of communication between the Communist Party and the people and a crucial means of disseminating propaganda, as Lynne Attwood convincingly demonstrated in 1999.[40] It is widely known how the Soviet state used thematic magazines to spread socialist ideology and form new patterns of social behavior among its citizens. Specialized magazines for women were an important tool in Central Asia, too. They served as a means of promoting new role models that their readers could follow in real life. In fact, during these years, "the Soviet press emerged as a serious forum for political debate."[41] Studying publications of women social scientists and women's magazines of the Tajik

[37] Dilarom Alimova and Nodira Azimova, "Women's Position in Uzbekistan Before and After Independence," in *Gender and Identity Construction : Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey.*, vol. 68, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 1999), 293–305.

[38] Anara Tabyshaleva, *Otrojenie vo Vremeni: Zametki k Istorii Polojeniya Jenshin Centralnoy Azii*, 1998.

[39] Zhanat Kundakbaeva, *Modernizatsiya Rannei Sovetskoe Epohi v Sudbah Jenshin Kazahstana, 1920-1930 gody: Monografiya /Modernization of the Early Soviet Era in the Fates of Women in Kazakhstan, 1920-1930* (Almaty: Kazakh State University named after Al-Farabi, 2017).

[40] Lynn Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Women: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Soviet Identity 1922-1953* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 11.

[41] Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost: Viewpoints from the Soviet Press*, 9.

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SSR from 1945 to the Perestroika years, Negar Elodie Behzadia and Lucia Direnberger found out in their study that the local women's magazines relied on the same gendered and ethnic imaginaries as in the discourses of their fellow colleagues from Moscow:

> The magazines established a distinction between a pre-October-Revolution period of women's exploitation, confinement, and abidance to oppressive Islamic/traditional rules and a post-Revolution liberation phase. In the 1950s and 1960s, women's magazines continuously presented testimony by women who celebrated the Soviet advancements that had liberated them from their roles as household domestic workers.[42]

Mary Buckley, on the other hand, has studied the representation of Soviet women not only in women's magazines but also in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Partiynaya Jizn* (Party Life) to discuss the initial Glasnost changes. She argues that the representation of the liberation of women in the Soviet Union contained conflicting messages; that is, even though articles stated women were liberated, they also touched upon the problems women were facing. According to her, the loosening of control during Perestroika brought expressions of not only feminist opinion but also conservative views into Soviet society.[43] Marianne Kamp, in her book *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, juxtaposes the oral interviews with *Saodat,* Uzbek women's magazines topics for the late 1920s to the 1930s, and concludes that editors of the time promoted their vision of new women, which was based on their *Jadid* background combined with Communist ideology. Apart from following the general line of the Moscow-based women's magazines *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'yanka*, the Uzbek women's magazine also promoted motherhood, a continuation of families, and private houses."[44]

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[42] Behzadi and Direnberger, "Gender and Ethnicity in the Soviet Muslim Peripheries: A Feminist Postcolonial Geography of Women's Work in the Tajik SSR (1950–1991)," 27.

[43] Mary E. A. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (University of Michigan Press, 1989).

[44] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.

Saodat's 1950 issue *(Uzbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* at the time) echoed Kamp's statements for the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to promoting familial values, it depicted a more future-oriented view of Uzbek women by calling for new industrial initiatives and encouraging women to pursue professional careers in science and industry, as well as in agriculture as drivers and cotton pickers.[45] Articles in the magazine also called on women to fight against "religious tradition."[46] Due to its specific objectives set by the Party that I discussed earlier in the works of Lynne Attwood, the magazine did not touch upon the obstacles, rejection, or reactions of family members to women's desires to join communist builders. Issues of Saodat in the 1950s demonstrated the success of Uzbek women in industry, agriculture, and science. Issues for October and November, 1950 were full of examples of successful women in all spheres of work, including those managing the double burden of work, study, and motherhood, to fully convince their readers. An article called "The keys to the world of knowledge are in our own hands" described the success story of Pulatoy Shohaidarova, a daughter of a peasant, who received her *Kandidat Nauk* degree (the Soviet equivalent of a Ph.D.) in mechanics and mathematics all the while studying at the university and taking care of her five-month-old son.[47]

The editors of the *Uzbekiston Xotin-Qizlari* in 1950 were determined to engage women in all spheres of life, not only in agriculture and industry but also in science, art, and performance; how it came about in practice is another story. Women were encouraged to take an example from their friends portrayed in the magazine. Their contribution to raising literacy, increasing production, and reproducing the nation was portrayed as equally beneficial engagement; the state would beat capitalism in the world, and they would become progressive and "cultural." The

[45] S. Hasanov, "15 Ming Kilogramm Paxta Teraman," *Uzbekiston Xotin Qizlari*, October 1950, 15.
[46] "Muhim Vazifalar Oldida," *Uzbekiston Xotin Qizlari*, October 1950, 1.
[47] Sharifa, "Bilimning Kaliti O'z Qo'limizda," *Uzbekiston Xotin Qizlari*, October 1950, 16.

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magazine created a carefully crafted picture of Uzbek women in the Stalinist era that aimed to shape the historical thinking of its readers. They had to appreciate the opportunities that appeared for women in contrast to the "backward" and religious pre-Soviet past. They were depicted as educated, active, and equal with men, combining work with their family duties. They also got instructions for plans, which were to work more than planned, follow progressive women in Moscow, and contribute to building communism in the world.[48]

What we do not learn from the magazine about Uzbek women in the 1950s, is how women managed multitasking, who supported or opposed them, and why most of the women did not go for higher education or leadership positions. These are also important challenges that women have to face. As Nancy Lubin claimed in 1981, the percentage of women going to work and entering higher education was in fact a minority in Central Asia, even in the Khrushchev era, which was famous for its achievements in welfare.[49] The agenda of the magazine in the post-war period was different. It was to remind women of their "dark past," celebrate the achievements of a selected number of women, and encourage them and others to do more. Most of this rhetoric, including about agricultural laborers and successful workers, will continue until the very last two years of Perestroika, and some, such as promoting women in higher education, will disappear from the pages of the magazine with gloomy pictures at the worksites replacing them, as we shall see in Chapter II.

When it comes to the studies of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* (Women of Kyrgyzstan), Aisuluu Namasbek kyzy's MA thesis, "Representation of Kyrgyz Women in Kyrgyz Soviet Magazine

[48] "Muhim Vazifalar Oldida," 1.

[49] On the statistical analysis of women's achievements in Central Asia during the Soviet Union see, for example, Nancy Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions," Soviet Studies 33, no. 2. 1981:182-203.

Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary," is the only scholarly work on Soviet time women's magazines in Kyrgyzstan I was able to find. In this study, Namasbek kyzy studied the ways the magazine presented Kyrgyz women to its readers in the early 1960s by analyzing the main discussions, topics, and issues that were raised in the magazine to understand how the magazine defined the emancipation of women. She also tried to explore women's cooperation with resistance to the emancipation process. She was able to find a significant level of cooperation among local women, however, there was no information about the resistance. She concludes that the absence of information about resistance may have been due to the nature of the journal.[50]

Similar to what I found in *Uzbekiston Xotin-Qizlari*, Aisuluu's findings show that the articles acknowledge the achievements and discuss the need for further improvement. As she puts it:

> Most of the articles praise the success of women in various fields: as teachers, tractor drivers, brigade-leaders, railway constructionists, and etc. However, these articles do not, at least, not explicitly, claim that equality between the sexes was achieved and the "woman question" was solved. Almost every article has two parts. In the first part, women's successes are acknowledged, but in the second part, things that need to be improved and developed are discussed.[51]

Indeed, Aisuluu gives a great many examples of such articles praising the achievements of Kyrgyz women but also acknowledging the lack of commitment and other obstacles on the ground, calling on the readers to do more. She concludes that *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* was following communist ideology but never suggested it was fully achieved. As a result, reaching communist ideals was a continuous process and not a conflict between the agenda and depictions, as argued by Mary Buckley.[52]

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[50] Aisuluu Namasbek Kyzy, "Representation of Kyrgyz Women in Kyrgyz Soviet Magazine "Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary"" (MA Thesis, Budapest, Central European University, 2014), 1, CEU eTD Collection.

[51] Namasbek Kyzy, 22.

[52] Namasbek Kyzy, 55.

The main topics of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary,* according to Aisuluu, evolved around "the public life (political participation, participation in clubs, lectures, etc.), conditions of working mothers, overcoming the "backward past", education, and the work of *Zhensovety* (women's councils). The policies abolishing traditional customs were of central importance in the magazine's rhetoric. The most significant example of crime against Kyrgyz women discussed in the magazine was the bride-kidnapping (abduction of women with the aim of forced marriage). The magazine published the police reports and interviewed some women who went through different hardships but chose education and work over customs, sometimes going against elderly women in their society and families. Other discussed stories include young girls escaping an arranged marriage or being kidnapped, and women refusing to pay the bride's price. All of these stories demonstrate the efforts of the editors to convince their readers that a part of the emancipated Kyrgyz women embraced Soviet policies and were cautiously using their rights for education.

Overall, Aisuluu's MA thesis, on the representation of Kyrgyz women in women's magazines in the early 1960s, points out the editors' depiction of Kyrgyz women as cooperating with the Soviet state and praising successful women's achievements. The magazine demonstrated no confusion about women's roles; it depicted women as committed to improving their conditions and determined to fight against "backward" customs. As we shall see in Chapter II, this straightforward depiction of Kyrgyz women using their rights and being committed to improving their conditions was shattered in 1990-1991, the magazine raised various issues and problems, solutions to which would not be possible without women's commitment and "fighting against the feudal past." On the contrary, the magazine will promote a positive depiction of customs, urging Kyrgyz women to integrate them into Soviet style lives.

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My review of the previous studies of the Central Asian magazines showed that local magazines followed the general line of the party in the 1950s and 1960s, as presented in the examples, and operated within the available limits. In these accounts, we do not get accounts of women who had different experiences or struggled to meet the expected standards. While during the initial Perestroika years, magazines reproduced the same images, from 1990 on, topics started varying, reflecting the general confusion and despair of the time.

Impact of Perestroika Reforms on Soviet Central Asian Society

Gorbachev was promoted to first secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 as a promising young candidate after the deaths of two previous secretaries in a row. He first initiated Perestroika reforms to end economic stagnation by introducing market oriented reforms. When these reforms failed to bring about the intended outcomes and instead raised dissatisfaction within the Party, he introduced political reforms of *demokratizatsiya* (democratization) in 1990, which meant stifling ideological censorship and decentralizing the overly controlling Soviet bureaucracy.[53] The development and outcomes of these initiatives were both traumatic and liberating for the Soviet republics, as they culminated in the Soviet Union's dissolution, with Kyrgyzstan announcing independence on August 31, 1991, and Uzbekistan on September 1, 1991. Confusion, hope for a freer future, nationalist sentiments, but also growing corruption, economic and industrial collapse, dread of instability, and incidents of pro-independence protests in some parts of the Union were all hallmarks of the six years of transition.

When Gorbachev launched the Perestroika reforms in 1985, Kyrgyzstan was the least economically developed republic in the USSR, with a GDP average of 1.2 percent in 1980 and the

[53] Scarborough, "The Extremes It Takes to Survive: Tajikistan and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985--1992," 11.

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income of the population lagging behind other Soviet republics.[54] Being economically disadvantaged, Kyrgyzstan was sensitive to the turmoil economic reforms caused. The rise in prices and unemployment generated social unrest and frustration among the population, and the first interethnic conflicts in Osh erupted in June 1990.[55] Akaev won the election in October 1990 by calling for radical and deep changes in the economy of the republic and on a wave of sharp criticism of the conservative approach of the previous administration led by Masaliev.[56]

When Gorbachev arrived, Uzbekistan, on the other hand, was at the center of a scandal of corruption in the cotton industry. Moscow-led investigations revealed over 4.5 million tons of cotton had been overreported between 1978-1983.[57] The majority of the party's leadership positions in Tashkent in 1986 were replaced after the cotton scandal by specialists sent from European Russia.[58] The wide coverage of the scandal on television and in the press created an image of Uzbeks as corrupt, and Russian policymakers and academics started describing Central Asia as a burden on the state."[59] Some went as far as to call the region "unassimilable" and "rejecting anything new."[60] In response, the national intelligentsia in Uzbekistan started pointing out the extremely low level of per capita income of the population, the ecological and health consequences of cotton monoculture, and the unrealistically high plans dictated from Moscow.[61]

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[54] Boris Z. Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment*, First Edition (Boston, Mass.: Unwin Hyman, 1989), cited in Nodir Ataev, "Economic Transition in the Kyrgyz Republic: Problems and Prospects" (Bishkek, International Ataturk-Alatoo University, 2011), 11.

[55] Rafis Abazov, "Policy of Economic Transition in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 2 (June 1999): 202.

[56] Abazov, 209.

[57] Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia. [Electronic Resource]: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 399.

[58] Khalid, 400.

[59] Khalid, 401.

[60] Khalid, 402.

[61] Khalid, 403.

Debates grew into various groups, and voices emerged calling for greater recognition of their national values and freedom to exercise their cultures.

To date, numerous studies have argued for various reasons ranging from the "inherited structural insufficiencies of the command economy,"[62] "new thinking within the Party leadership,"[63] "nationalist mobilizations,"[64] and "Perestroika reforms spiraled out of control."[65] More recently however, Vladislav M. Zubok argued that "Gorbachev sacrificed the Soviet empire to bring the Soviet Union closer to the West, which turned out to be wildly unpopular among the party elite."[66] Looking back to Perestroika in 2021, Gorbachev believed it was the right thing to do:

> Perestroika went through various stages. We were searching, we had our illusions, we made mistakes, and we had our achievements. If given a chance to start anew, I would have done many things differently, but I am confident that historically, Perestroika was a just cause. This means two things: first, Perestroika was necessary, and second, we were moving in the right direction. [67]

Although it is often referred to as a peaceful transformation into nation-states, interethnic clashes in the Southern Caucasus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and civil war in Tajikistan have also been argued as consequences of Perestroika and the way these societies were shaped throughout the Soviet era. Ronald Suny, studying Caucasian countries, argued for the important role of nationalistic sentiments in the last years of Perestroika. According to him, the collapse "was caused in good measure by nationalism, that is, by the demands of the subject nationalities of the USSR

[62] Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 2.

[63] Vendulka Kubálková, "Soviet 'New Thinking' and the End of Cold War: Five Explanations," in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 145.

[64] Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47.

[65] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted : The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 178.

[66] Magnúsdóttir, "Khrushchev's Cold War," 209.

[67] Mikhail S. Gorbachev, "Perestroika and New Thinking: A Retrospective," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 29, no. 3 (2021): 211.

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for genuine independence and autonomy."[68] However, as Adeeb Khalid correctly stated in his recent book on the imperial history of Central Asia, "much of the national discourse of Perestroika was a complaint about the unfulfilled promise of the Leninist nationalities policy and a plea for its implementation."[69] Additionally, Isaac Scarborough, studying the civil war that followed the Perestroika reforms in Tajikistan, argued that the economic collapse brought about by the reforms was the primary reason for the collapse.[70] While these are important accounts, more studies are needed to understand the dynamics within the different groups in each country apart from the discourse of the party elite. Besides, a comprehensive study of pro-independence groups like the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan and the Erk Party in Uzbekistan that emerged in the 1990s is yet to be conducted.

Whether the goal was to leave the Soviet Union or not, the final years of Perestroika saw a variety of debates about socialism and nationhood. Studying the press will open up a window into the Perestroika debates and help us better imagine the time.

Nationalism and Women

As articles in the magazines frequently touched upon the topic of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz nations, I focus on their depictions of these nations to understand what kind of role the press assigned to Kyrgyz and Uzbek women as representing the nation. Ronald Suny, in *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union,* studied the impact of nationality politics on the development of national self-consciousness and understanding of history among the people in the peripheries of the former Soviet Union. Taking the approach of nations

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[68] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1993), ix.

[69] Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia. [Electronic Resource] : A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 409.

[70] Isaac Scarborough, "(Over)Determining Social Disorder: Tajikistan and the Economic Collapse of Perestroika," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 2 (2016): 442.

being "imagined" and "constructed" following Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric J. Hobsbawm, Suny argued that 'the making of nations' occurs when "people begin to believe that they can communicate more easily with some than with others; when they begin to define who is within the group and who are the 'others,' when they begin to gain the capacity to act in whatever 'interests' they believe they share."[71] This approach enables us to engage with the role of discourse and meaning-making. That is, social and cultural processes are shaped by individuals' specific social, cultural, and linguistic experiences rather than objective realities that exist outside of a given society or nationality. Experience does not result from an unmediated response but rather is discursively constituted.[72] Nationalities are constantly being made and remade, and the meaning given to experience on a collective level and the creation of a national consciousness depend on the active work of individuals, parties, media, and intellectuals.[73] They in turn promote a particular perception of a society and its history and borrow or invent social and ethnic "traditions" in their political attainments. Taking the same approach, Adeeb Khalid studied the "making" of the Uzbek nation in the early years of the Soviet Union to track how the local intelligentsia, in cooperation with the Bolsheviks, created the new Uzbek identity. In my study, I adopt the same approach to understanding nationalism as a process of constructing nations according to which ethnicities existed in various historical periods, but their political claims are the specific products of historically derived discourses of their own times.[74]

Building on the constructive and discursive approach to studying nations, Nira Yuval-Devis argued that the constructions of nations are gendered and based on conservative notions of social order. They construct the model of a nation in which women represent the private sphere,

[71] Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 6.
[72] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry*, Summer, 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.
[73] Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 10.
[74] Suny, 19.

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emphasizing child-bearing and child-rearing by women to "reproduce" the nation, while men are portrayed as breadwinners and act in the name of the nation as "protectors" of the nation.[75] Women are also seen as "responsible for transmitting the history, traditions, culture, and values of the nation. Their identities are relegated to the domestic sphere, where they are to function primarily as reproducers and socializers of future citizens, while men are portrayed as political actors and defenders of the nation."[76]

Applying Yuval-Davis´ concept to Central Asian women during Perestroika, I explore the ways the press presented women's roles and participation in the construction of new nations in how they:

- Emphasize cultural revival and preservation of traditional gender roles. In this regard, I look into the ways women presented in the magazines were engaging in the preservation of cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and customs.
- Emphasize the reproduction of a nation. I study the ways women were presented as mothers, wives, and guardians of cultural and moral values not only in ideological terms but also as part of the overall socio-political landscape where the depiction of this role was influenced by religious and ethnic factors too.
- Emphasize the gendered impact of economic reforms. Look into the depiction of the gendered consequences of economic restructuring, privatization, and decentralization on women's employment.

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[75] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), 15.

[76] Carol S. Lilly and Jill A. Irvine, "Negotiating Interests: Women and Nationalism in Serbia and Croatia, 1990-1997," *East European Politics and Societies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 112.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first provided an overview of the thesis design, discussing the research questions, methodology, and thesis structure. I then provided a literature review on the historical context of "Woman Quesion" in the Central Asian context. Following that, I reviewed some of the research on the press's representation of Soviet Central Asian women. I concluded this chapter by examining the impact of Perestroika reforms on Central Asian societies.

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Chapter 2. Representation of Labor in Uzbek and Kyrgyz Women's Lives in the Press

> *Shukur* means contentment and satisfaction. However, I cannot find a way to come to terms with its meaning. Because, in my opinion, "shukur" masks all the sufferings and regrets (*armonlar*) of a soul and prevents their expression. "Are you happy with your life, Fazilat Opa?" I wish to ask, but I don't because my heart already knows she will respond, *shukur*.[77]

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* and *Saodat,* as well as other relevant press, depicted Central Asian women as participants in the workforce during the Perestroika years. First, I analyze the ways they celebrated women's achievements and contributions to various industrial, agricultural, professional, and cultural fields, highlighting their capabilities and success stories. I start with the discussion of depictions of women through the idea of women's empowerment through wage labor. I analyze the articles where editors showcased the experiences of women who managed to break traditional gender roles and pursue diverse careers. I continue with a discussion of magazines portraying the Soviet image of women balancing work with motherhood through the examples of women who were exemplary citizens.

In the second part of this chapter, I look at the changes in the depiction of work that came with Gorbachev's *demokratizatsia* (democratization) policy in 1990. When opposition within the party grew as a result of the economic chaos caused by the 1985 economic reforms, he introduced democratization under Glasnost (openness). Overall, in this part, I discuss how the press depicted women's work primarily in negative terms. I discuss examples where *Lenin Yo'li* urged women to abandon labor and prioritize motherhood, as well as the accounts of some women who supported these claims. I also explore some articles about successful cases of women holding political

[77] Muhlis Jurabek, "'Shukur' Ortidagi Armonlar," *Saodat*, August 1991, 17.

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positions as party delegates. Magazines portrayed delegate women as devout people who raised issues that affected the women in their communities. I finish this chapter with a discussion of self-immolation cases in the late 1980s as a response to severe conditions in rural Uzbekistan. This topic was not widely discussed in Saodat, so I turned to the Moscow-based press and the Tashkent-based Russian language newspaper Pravda Vostoka for a more comprehensive picture of the situation.

Early Perestroika Years: Reproducing the Image of a Soviet Woman

Acknowledging the Soviet Achievements

According to Russian historian Irina Morozova's analysis, Kazakh media in the initial Perestroika years were primarily concerned with the need for economic reconstruction, but from 1989 on, the media emphasized the importance of national reconstruction and the restoration of national-linguistic traditions.[78] This trend was also present in the local press by and about women in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Until 1990, although there were some demands to improve working conditions, the roles were mostly about reproducing and maintaining the Soviet image of women who were primarily engaged in production and agriculture while finding a balance between work and motherhood. On special socialist celebrations, magazines depicted women as reflecting on the pre-October Revolution conditions of Central Asian women to celebrate their overall achievements under the Soviet state and stay grateful.

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[78] Irina Morozova, "On the Causes of Socialism's Deconstruction: People's Perceptions in Contemporary Kazakhstan and Mongolia," *Cambridge Central Asia Reviews* 1, no. 1 (2014): 17.

Figure 1 For the 70th Anniversary of the Revolution, Saodat, October 1987

In the issue of *Saodat* dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the revolution, a collage photo of liberated women is compared with a photograph of a woman in a clay house with her head veiled. The caption says, "These beautiful girls are the descendants of those brave women of *Hujum.* They got this happiness as a result of the Revolution," whereas the photo with the veiled woman in the cave says, "A glimpse into the past life in a museum photo."[79] It concluded that women were discovering their potential in different areas in a state that cares about its citizens.

[79] Zulfiya Muminova, "Inqiliobning 70 Yilligiga," *Saodat,* 1987.

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Figure 2 A women in the past, Saodat, October 1987

Magazines producing Soviet style success stories of women who had overcome obstacles and established successful careers would play a critical role in the magazine's efforts to preserve the memory of veiled and oppressed Uzbek women in the past. Sora Eshonto'rayeva's (Russian: Sara Ishanturaeva, 1911-1998) life journey, described in 1987 on the pages of *Saodat*, symbolized this image. Born into a poor family, she lost her father at a young age and grew up initially in a better-off family that could afford to feed her and later in a Tashkent boarding school for girls, where she began acting in plays. Being one of the first women to abandon *paranja* (veiling), Sora got her acting training in Moscow in 1927 and started her professional career at the Uzbek drama theater in the late 1920s. Eshonto'rayeva, who lost her friends in the backlash to *hujum*, later survived Stalin's purges in the late 1930s, and built a long career in theater and film, represented an ideal case for the magazine. She recalled waiting for the rice to cook in her childhood in the pre-revolutionary period after her father had brought a kilo of rice that he had traded for two new blankets, how the price of a loaf of bread became 500 sums during World War II, how they acted in cold theaters with no heating system, and how actors would sew dresses for the performance by

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themselves due to a lack of sewing workshops.[80] She believed the task of young generations was to preserve peace and stability in society. As she put it in the form of a folk saying, "Enjoy your pleasant days, but never forget your difficult and painful days in the past. Remember. Then you will experience and appreciate your happiness more thoroughly."[81] With this, she reinforced the journal's intentions of remembering the patriarchal past in which women had no access to education or work and encouraging readers to value and use the opportunities that came with emancipation.

Figure 3 Sora Eshonto'rayeva, Saodat, March 1987

Equally, Ayymbübü Bötökhanova, one of the initial editors of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* in the issue from February 1991, reflected on how far women had come since the early emancipation years in her interview for the 40th anniversary of the magazine. According to her, "in the late 1940s, women in rural Kyrgyzstan faced obstacles in their efforts to get an education, and join

[80] Sora Eshonto'rayeva, "Baxtimiz Manzili," *Saodat*, March 1987, 6.
[81] Sora Eshonto'rayeva, 6.

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public life."[82] She recalled how the delegates from Aravan district, a rural area, expressed concerns about young women studying in Frunze whose parents would marry them off during the women's conference in Bishkek in 1948. They reported that "the number of girls starting high school was 3139, but only two graduated that year. In addition, girls said that their parents would sell them for *kalyn* (a bride price) to rich men when they returned home during the break because they were 'a burden to feed.' There were cases when these women were kidnapped and forced into marriage too."[83] Both women's accounts use the Soviet language of portraying Central Asia as "backward," in which the aim was to advance from the "dark past" with "feudal" practices such as "kalyn." The fact that the magazines depicted their narration in chronological order, starting from the 1920s to the present, shows the linear thinking in which societies advance from backward societies to civilized societies. Central Asian women, in their depictions, had been making advancements since the 1920s, and these women's stories were meant to validate this.

The story of Akima Joldosheva, the first woman to graduate from the Kyrgyz Pedagogical Institute in 1936, follows the same logic of thought but adds adversity and character to appeal to readers' emotions. The March issue of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* from 1988 tells her story of enrolling in a Tatar elementary school in Naryn after hearing about it from a friend she met while playing in the neighborhood. Although her parents were not opposed to her attending school, they did not approve of her intention to study in Tashkent after graduating from the technical college in Bishkek (Pishpek at the time). In 1925, to avoid making her parents suspicious, she left without telling them or taking any belongings with her. She met a Russian girl who became a close friend and supported her throughout her studies in Tashkent. Eventually, she returned to Kyrgyzstan and became a teacher at a high school and the director of a girls' pedagogical college in Bishkek. Her spouse, the

[82] Haydarova, "Byyyl 'Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary' jurnalyna 40 Jyl," 3.
[83] Haydarova, 3.

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Commissar for Education in Kirghiz ASSR, Tokchor Joldoshev, was persecuted during the Great Purge, but she blamed it on the misdeeds of others rather than the Communist party.[84] This depiction of her attitudes toward people as suspicious while remaining loyal to the state demonstrates the assumption that the state was the ultimate justice and that people had flaws. This portrayal also depicted the state as the supreme power, for which women had to accept the sacrifice of their partner's life. This departs from common depictions of the family as a building block of the communist state, as we shall see in the next section, and also from the depiction of press in the late 1980s in Russia, as studied by Irina Tartakovskaya.[85]

Figure 4 Kurbanjan Sarybashova, Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary, March 1988

Kurbanjan Sarybashova, an ethnic Uzbek from the Bazar-Korgon region of Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad Oblast, was another courageous woman who showcased going through the various stages of socialism's construction. Her father, Rahim Qariya, was illiterate, but during his trip to

[84] T. Abdieva, "Köch Bashy," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, March 1988, 7.

[85] Irina Tartakovskaya, "The Changing Representation of the Gender Roles in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Press," in *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 119.

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Tashkent in 1923, he met a Russian teacher working at the Central Asian Communist University (CACU), a branch of the prestigious Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) which was a center for the ideological training of communist and revolutionary cadres of the East in 1921-1930.[86] He offered his support if Rahim Qariya wished his child to study at CACU. Rahim Qariya returned home to take his daughter to Tashkent. Kurbanjan had to disguise herself as they left the village for Tashkent. She dressed in men's clothes to avoid drawing the attention of the villagers. After she graduated from CACU, on her way home, Kurbanjan met Jumadil Sarbashov, an ethnic Kyrgyz sent to work in the party's Bazar-Korgon propaganda and agitation committee. This story carries multiple messages: first, opportunities emerged for rural women, lifting them all the way to a prestigious educational institution that existed in Central Asia at the time; second, the commitment of men to women's education went against the societal expectations of motherhood in Central Asia in the early 1920s. It is especially interesting that she did not wear *paranja* at a time when the state was launching anti-paranja discourse, but society did not accept it. Kurbanjan disguised herself as a man at night to avoid being noticed by members of the community. The Hujum campaign would begin a few years later, in 1927. Finally, the story depicts interethnic marriages as the norm in the early years of Soviet rule. Kurbanjan, an Uzbek woman, married Jumadil, a Kyrgyz party member, after meeting him on the train.[87] Adrianne Edgar investigated interethnic marriages in Soviet Central Asian families, which were celebrated in the official discourse as proof of people's unbreakable friendship and the emergence of the communist promise of "Soviet people."[88] However, her findings state that "the official Soviet view of ethnic nationality

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[86] Natal'ya Nikolayevna Timofeyeva, "Kommunisticheskiy Universitet Trudyashchikhsya Vostoka (KUTV) - Tsentr Ideynoy Podgotovki Kommunisticheskikh i Revolyutsionnykh Kadrov Vostoka" (Institute of Oriental Studies AS USSR, 1988), 1.

[87] B. Abdukerimov, "Kurbanjan Baskan Jol," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, March 1988, 7.

[88] Adrienne Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples : Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 212, https://doi.org/10.7591/j.ctv1s04wfc.

became increasingly primordial and even racialized in the USSR's final decades."[89] But Kurbanjan and Jumadil are portrayed as recipients of the socialist state and promoters of socialism in their communities, in accordance with the official discourse. In accordance with Soviet press culture, which overlooked moments that did not fit the state propaganda, challenges or disapproval of the community they may have faced are not discussed as well.

Figure 5 Jamila Saidova and her husband Apsamat, Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary, September 1986

Balancing work and family

In addition to reminding its readers of the long path of emancipation, the magazines portrayed women's lives as balancing work and motherhood. They periodically interviewed or published the letters of readers who shared their stories with the magazine. In 1986, a correspondent of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* conducted an interview with Jamila Saidova, a worker at the Frunze collective farm in the Jany-Jol district, which provides an example of a story of women who strove to live a life useful to their society, establishing family life and raising children at the

[89] Edgar, 213.

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same time. After Saipova failed to pass the university entrance exam, it says, "she returned to her village without feeling shame to join the collective farm."[90] While the corespondent does not elaborate on the reasons for Saipova's failure and her reaction to it, it promotes the image of a woman committed to serving the state. The type of work does not matter as long as she "served people and the state." The representation of women in the 1950s and 1960s that I reviewed in the Literature Review Chapter, on the contrary, contained a more balanced image of Central Asian women. They were involved in science and the arts compared to the predominantly farmer woman image of the 1980s. This is consistent with Moscow's preference for mechanized agriculture over industrialization in Central Asian countries. In addition, she married Apsamat, a fellow farmer in the kolkhoz. Apsamat supported her in learning how to drive a tractor, and the two continued to work together in the kolkhoz. In the interview, Saipova said happiness for her "is when, together and with the support of my husband, I can serve people and raise my children."[91] Their story painted a picture of Central Asian women and men content with the agricultural work they did, implying that individual aspirations must be shaped in accordance with state priorities. This assumption can be traced back to the disproportionately large number of farmer women in Central Asia, whereas images of women involved in science were scarce in the last six years of the empire. Furthermore, as kolkhoz members in rural areas, women mostly worked as unskilled farm laborers, with only a few exceptions holding skilled jobs that were dominated by men throughout the Soviet era.[92] Apsamat "supported" Saipova, implying that men were directing women's achievements, or "approving," as she is said to have learned to drive a tractor after Apsamat "agreed." Another message portrayed in their example is the role of family as "the primary cell in communist society"

[90] "Jamilanyn Baktysy," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, February 1986, 28.
[91] "Jamilanyn Baktysy," 28.
[92] Kamp, "The Soviet Legacy and Women's Rights in Central Asia," 271.

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to use Tartakovskaya's words.[93] The example portrays "cooperation" between the state and individuals and even "loyalty."

Given the historically strong communal ties in Central Asian societies, one possible reward of working in kolkhozes, aside from financial support, could be recognition by the local administration in the eyes of their community. They would gain the respect of their community and become well-known within it. Articles in both magazines for this period have plenty of stories like Saipova. In the same way *Lenin Yo'li* portrayed the stories of farming women from Osh, an agricultural province. There are many stories of and about women at work in the field, planting, nurturing, collecting the harvest, and milking cows, as depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3. The majority of the women's work photos were stand-alone contributions to the newspaper with little detail, with women smiling, implying they were happy with their work, the image of which drastically changed in just a few years, as we will see in the next section on the late Perestroika years.

In the early Perestroika, depictions of Central Asian women in the press primarily promoted them as farmers content with their work and lives. Their lives were depicted in accordance with Moscow's priorities in the region, which were agricultural production. In the 1980s, Uzbekistan alone supplied about 64 percent of Soviet cotton,[94] whereas Kyrgyzstan's 40 percent of the labor force and one third of the population were involved in animal husbandry and cattle herding along with producing fodder crops, wool, cotton, tobacco, sugar beet, fruits, and vegetables.[95]

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[93] Tartakovskaya, "The Changing Representation of the Gender Roles in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Press," 119.

[94] Mayhew, Richmond, and Plunkett, *Central Asia*, 48; cited in Ataev, "Economic Transition in the Kyrgyz Republic," 8.

[95] Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan*, 66; Ataev, cited in "Economic Transition in the Kyrgyz Republic," 9.

Figure 8 Lenin Yo'li, August 2, 1991

Figure 7 Lenin Yo'li, September 10, 1991

Figure 6 Lenin Yo'li, February 26, 1991

At the same time, signs of market-oriented reforms launched in 1985 started appearing in the Central Asian press in 1989. The fact that this type of article appeared so late could be attributed to the still-existing censorship, which was only lifted with Glasnost in 1990. But it also shows some success in people reorienting their activities and connections to labor. As previously discussed, labor and work were previously associated with loyalty to the state, but now they are associated with creativity and less with the state. An article from the September 8th issue of *Lenin Yo'li* in 1989 about Ahmedova in textile production below illustrates how labor remained an important aspect of women's lives in the midst of Perestroika but at the same time suggests how small state-owned enterprises were reacting to marketization initiatives by diversifying products:

Sewers with skillful hands

> Workers of the national section of the *Muras* (heritage) craftsmen's union pay particular attention to their clothing production. They are producing tens of kinds of clothes according to the needs and desires of their clients, thus gaining popularity among them. There are many sewers at the union whose hands perform miracles. The good quality of the clothes is the result of the work of an experienced and demanding master. Sohibahon Ahmedova (in photo) has the reputation of a skilled master despite her young age. It´s been long since she joined the *do'ppi* (skullcap) sewing workshop of the union. She mastered her craft in a short period of time.

> Sohibahon learned to sew skullcaps from her mother, Saodathon, who is an experienced seamstress in the workshop. Having learned the secrets of sewing *do'ppi* from her mom since childhood, Sohibahon joined the workshop without any doubt after graduating from high school. Now, mother and daughter are working together. Their different *Chust*, *Iroqi*, and *Margilon do'ppis* (different styles of skullcap from different cities)[96] are especially outstanding.
>
> S. Ahmedova's colleagues, O. Matkosimova, M. Mamadiyorova, and P. Kolesnichenko, are also skilled sewers. The union's team is making its contribution to the economic well-being of the organization by accomplishing its duties more than planned.[97]

In the above example, we see motherhood presented as an integral feature of Soviet women's lives in addition to labor, as Ahmedova learned the necessary skills from her mother. *Stazhirovki* (internships) were essential throughout the Soviet era, but it is the mother who trains her daughter here. This demonstrates the transmission of a craft from mother to daughter and demonstrates that traditional methods of skill transmission persisted in Central Asian society, despite the Soviet ideology of creating conditions for education and women joining the workforce following special state education.

Another departure from early or mid-soviet propaganda depicting workers is that the description does not refer to the quantity of goods produced but rather to their quality. At the same time, it still stays within broad plan-based thinking as it concludes by mentioning the fact that the union overperforms its plans. Equally, we can see a market-oriented production of goods as the author mentions how important it is for the sewers to take people's needs and desires into account while designing their products. We can see that in 1989, as market-orientedness began to take hold, articles began to become more rooted in the present. We do not get the account of the "dark past" and that "we should be thankful," "remember," and "do the same" anymore but depiction of promoting for "economic well-being" of the workers, clients and the enterprise.

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[96] A. Hojiyev et al., *Hozirgi O'zbek Tili Faol So'zlarining Izohli Lug'ati* (Tashkent: Sharq, 2001), 43.
[97] O. Komilov, "Qo'li Gul Tikuvchilar," *Lenin Yo'li*, September 8, 1989, 2.

Figure 9 Lenin Yo'li, September 8, 1989

Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary and *Saodat* also published stories about the difficulties of working women's conditions, especially those in textile production and in tobacco and cotton plants. The women in these articles were portrayed as strong personalities who managed the difficulties. For instance, during the cotton harvest season, many rural families that depended on cotton cultivation for their income would frequently work long hours in the fields. In the late Perestroika years' the most widely criticized topic became cotton monoculture, which was depicted as a way for self-realization for rural men and women before 1990. Bahtiyor Mansurov's article about Shahrinisa Ablazova, a cotton picker in rural Uzbekistan, depicts a woman who, despite adverse weather and demanding fieldwork, rose through the ranks to become the brigadier of a cotton-growing team due to her strength of character and determination.[98] Ablazova's mother divorced her when she was a child. She worked in sovkhoz in the Pakhtakor region of Jizzakh, and eventually Ablazova became a sovkhoz worker too. She is portrayed as someone who dedicated her life to cotton production despite the hardships of the field. What is more, "she is used to these conditions and

[98] Bahtiyor Mansurov, "Kuz Qutlug' Kelsin," *Saodat*, September 1988, 8.

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cannot imagine a different life."[99] In 1988, her team overperformed the plan by collecting 36 centners of cotton instead of the planned 31.5 centners from each hectare.

Ablazova is the last super hero woman from Uzbekistan's fields to appear on the pages of *Saoda*t. She and the other women whose stories I discussed represent "the oppressed of the oppressed," in the words of Vladimir Ilich Lenin, who emancipated themselves from the "dark past" and went against "backward traditions" to serve the communist state alongside their spouses. By portraying their stories, magazines served as mouthpieces for the normative of the Soviet state and urged the "young generation" to "remember" and "do the same." Minor criticisms were portrayed as a work in progress or as something that could be fixed by the strong character and dedication of Central Asian women, primarily involved in agriculture.

Figure 10 Let Fall Be Great, Saodat, September 1988

[99] Bahtiyor Mansurov, 8.

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Late Perestroika years: separating labor from the state

In this section, I analyze the articles about women's working conditions in the late period of Perestroika. I start with articles on difficult working conditions, which took on a more critical tone after state censorship was lifted as part of the second wave of Glasnost political reforms in 1990. Then I move on to review articles about emerging opportunities with the democratization policies as part of Glasnost that Uzbek and Kyrgyz women tried to utilize. I finish the chapter with an analysis of self-immolation cases as reported in *Saodat* and some other Moscow-based and Russian language newspapers in Tashkent.

Invisible work in the cotton fields and cocoon production

In 1990, economic reforms created dissatisfaction among the party members, and Gorbachev introduced political reforms that were directed at opponents of Perestroika. The new reforms aimed at involving the population in decision making whereas Glasnost meant lifting state censorship. Gorbachev believed economic reforms would get support from the people when he initiated them. However, with loosened control from the center (*yuqoridan/jogorudan* literally *from above* in Uzbek/Kyrgyz) articles in the press took on a critical tone. Diverse voices rose with the tendency to dissociate labor from the state and emphasize familial relations in the final two years.

While Dina Omanova's analysis of the contributions of letter writing women to *Rabotnitsa* established the active agency of reader-women in critiquing the state in the European part of the Soviet Union,[100] the above analysis of *Saodat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* demonstrated there was

[100] Dina Omanova, *"Female Workers Are Still Waiting for Your Answer, ComradeNovoselov!": Soviet Women's Agency in the Rabotnitsa Magazine, 1953-1964*, CEU Gender Studies Department Master Theses 2019/24 (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), 63.

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limited criticism among readers, or they have not been published. The discussed acknowledgements of hard conditions were portrayed as things to "overcome" with "strong will" and "dedication" by women. They were more concentrated on "reminding women of the dark past" and "how far women in Central Asia had come." While Namasbek Kyzy acknowledges articles from the early 1960s in *Kyrgyzstan Ayalrary* contained two parts, first "praising the achievements" and second "things to improve," these were not criticisms directed at the state and way of life at large, as is the case with the late Perestroika issues of *Saodat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*.

A number of articles in *Saodat* from this period focus on the intentions of the state to increase the productivity of women by easing working conditions and taking over child-rearing through kindergartens and schooling, as well as the realities on the ground with a shortage of daycare facilities throughout the country.

The same tendency during this period was present in Russia. Sarah Ashwin and Elain Bowers, who studied the conditions of women in Russia during Perestroika, argued that the number of articles on the negative aspects of women's employment increased in the media during Perestroika, which, according to her, "partly reflected a wish to protect men from unemployment."[101] Articles claimed that Russian women "had to be allowed to fulfill their biological destiny as wives and mothers, because emancipation for Soviet women had come to mean freedom from work for some."[102] This kind of attitude can be traced in some articles in the Central Asian press, which show the criticism in the press was situated in the broader Soviet context of "emphasizing" negative aspects of women's work. This tendency can be attributed to the 1990 laws supporting motherhood and family. Two laws of the Soviet Council of Ministers of

[101] Sarah Ashwin and Elain Bowers, "Do Russian Women Want to Work?," in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.

[102] Ashwin and Bowers, 22.

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the USSR, *On the Urgent Measures to Improve the Position of Women, Protection of Family, Maternity, and Childhood* from April 10, 1990, and *On the Additional Measures to Provide the Social Protection of Families with Children in the View of the Transition to the Regulated Market Economy* adopted on August 2 of the same year, were extensively discussed.[103] The laws specifically stated that they aim at "strengthening the family prestige," "supporting family traditions," and "respecting parents."[104] Moscow articles discussed removing women from hazardous working conditions, but as Ashin writes, "due to financial constraints, women continued working in hazardous conditions."[105] The articles in *Saodat* suggested women in Uzbekistan had to opt for heavy jobs despite the law limiting women's engagement in areas requiring heavy physical work. In a 1990 interview with Saodat's correspondent Ulugova, Oydin Abbosova, the head of the department on the protection of motherhood and children, said that women used to work in places where lifting seven thousand kilos per day was the norm.[106] She believed it was because women needed paid jobs to support their families. Shodieva, the head of the Surhandaryo regional women's committee, told *Saodat's* correspondent a year later that if men could earn enough to support their families, there would be no need for women to work.[107]

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[103] "Women in the Ex-USSR Today," *Against the Current* (blog), August 1992.
[104] "Women in the Ex-USSR Today."
[105] Ashwin and Bowers, "Do Russian Women Want to Work?," 22.
[106] M. Ulugova, "Yangi Imtiyozlar va … Yana Muammolar …," *Saodat*, July 1990, 9.
[107] H. Usmanova, "Yo'llar Yo'llarga Tutash: Surxondaryo Viloyati Xotin-Qizlar Qo'mitasi Raisi Bo'ritosh Shodiyeva Bilan Suhbat," *Saodat*, March 1991, 12.

Figure 11 A cotton picker, Saodat, October, 1990

With a critical tone in the press, the costs of Uzbekistan being the top cotton producer in the Soviet Union started to emerge. It came at a high cost in terms of women's exploitation and damage to the environment.[108] However, flaws in the centralized cotton production system and cotton monoculture, which resulted in strict quotas, extensive irrigation, and widespread corruption among Uzbek elites, have been the subject of public debate since the "cotton scandal."[109] However, the impact on women's health started appearing only in the 1990s. In addition, the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides was another problem discussed in the magazine. In an effort to boost yields, the Soviet government encouraged the use of these chemicals, but this degraded the soil, contaminated the water supply, and deteriorated the health

[108] Due to the diversion of rivers for irrigation, the Aral Sea, once among the largest lakes in the world, started to shrink, leading to severe environmental issues in the area.

[109] Khalid, *Central Asia. [Electronic Resource]*, 411.

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of the farmers. They were generally required to work long hours in hazardous conditions with little to no compensation or medical care. Taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the passage of the above mentioned law on April 10, 1990, women's councils in Uzbekistan requested compensation for women working in cotton fields. This was presented as an attempt by women in the ministries to instrumentalize the law. In its aim to support motherhood, the law enabled a half-shift or a half of the week working shift, for women with children under 14 years of age. Yet, with the economic devastation, Abbosova was skeptical about the implementation of the law. For example, she was skeptical of the fact that women would go for half shifts and lose half of their salaries.[110]

Low wages were another problem associated with women in the cotton fields. The centralized system of cotton production contributed to the low wages in the industry by failing to offer farmers sufficient support or just compensation. In the same interview, Abbosova said 98 percent of the farmers were women because it was not possible to feed a family with the 40–50 sums cotton pickers got per month, forcing men to leave for regional centers or Tashkent. With the apparent failure of cotton monoculture, Abbosova informed the *Saodat* reporter that the Uzbek Party members raised the need to develop "light and local industry in the country,"[111] but in the midst of economic and political turmoil, chances were minimal.

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[110] Ulugova, "Yangi Imtiyozlar va … Yana Muammolar …," 9.
[111] Ulugova, 9.

Figure 12 12 Cocoon growers, Saodat, March 1990

Another sphere with similar problems was the cocoon industry (*pillachilik*), widely practised in rural Uzbekistan. It was organized as a small-scale, family-run activity primarily focused on silk production by processing the cocoons that silkworms made. Mulberry trees, grown by farmers, were fed to silkworms, which produced cocoons in about 40 days. Following collection and processing into silk thread, the cocoons were then sold to textile mills for use in creating clothing and other products. One member of the family would register the work under her or his name and get compensation from the government. However, the complex work required the involvement of at least 4–5 members who would not receive the symbolic amount allocated to only the registered member of the family. While the government provided assistance to farming families, including access to credit and technical support for raising silkworms and mulberry trees, it did not reach all families. Saodat´s correspondent, Muhlis Jurabek, wrote farmers suffered from the corrupt local government, which indicated twice or more the number of technical support or

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coal provided in the reports. In addition, farmers would get 6-7 sums (Soviet time Uzbek currency) for a kilo of cocoon in the 1990s, compared to 20 sums in Kyrgyzstan and 25 sums in Azerbaijan, whereas the world price was 136 sums at the same time.[112] Doubling the price as part of the 1990 reforms did not help much because people buying the cocoons began reselling them to foreign countries, denying farmers any benefit. Additionally, with a shortage of coal supply, some people were forced to place their silkworms in their living rooms to create the necessary temperature in the cold seasons. People would use more rooms in their houses with the aim of increasing the number of cocoons. To produce a box of cocoons, one had to occupy 4-5 rooms, and a box would cost 4 sums. Jurabek compared cocoon growers with city residents, who would rent out the rooms for 30 sums per month for each person and make 150 sums per month to shopw the missed opportunities for rural population. This article and other articles discussing the farmers in both sectors of production repeatedly mentioned the fact that farmers suffered from food shortages; they could eat meat only the day they got their salaries and would wear the same clothes for several years as they could not afford to buy new ones.[113]

Adeed Khalid also compared the money farmers received for a kilo of cotton in Tsarist times, which was enough to buy a cow, with the late 1980s, which was enough to buy a box of matches, to show how payment levels dropped.[114] Jurabek calls the contentment of the cocoon growers, including Fazilat Opa, who did not complain and opted for contentment with what they got, "a moral tragedy for the nation" and concluded they did not ask for better pay or take up other jobs because they were used to this way of life.[115] Cultural norms emphasizing resilience, as well as strong family ties providing a sense of support, could have influenced this choice for some

[112] Jurabek, "'Shukur' Ortidagi Armonlar," 17.
[113] Jurabek, 17.
[114] Khalid, *Central Asia. [Electronic Resource]*, 404.
[115] Jurabek, "'Shukur' Ortidagi Armonlar," 18.

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women like Fazilat Opa. Her choice of *shukur* reflects Central Asian cultural expectations for women's acceptance in the face of adversity and not complaining, no matter how difficult the situation is. At the same time, it can also be explained by the strong family and community bonds and support networks that persist in the rural areas of Central Asia. During difficult times, women have traditionally depended on these networks for emotional and practical support. The sense of community and mutual support could have relieved some of their stress and contributed to their attainment of the norms.

The twin word of *shukur* is *sabr,* which means patience. Another article *Let´s Be Patient, Sisters!* by O.Mirzajonova on the March 31, 1990 issue of *Lenin Yo'li* encouraged women to practice sabr during difficult times as a way to deal with temporal challenges and strengthen family bonds. She gave the example of mother-in-laws arguing with their daughters-in-law over everyday tasks that, in comparison to previous struggles, fostered distrust and disdain in the family. At the same time, she urged the younger ladies to exercise *sbar* in order to keep their families together.[116] She claimed all obstacles were temporal, and women had to "endure" them with *sabr* and acceptance. This example shows how loosening censorship along with the law supporting "family values" led to cultural norms and gender and age-based expectations in Central Asian communities becoming accepted in the press. Urging younger women to be patient and treat family members with respect in order to eventually achieve recognition from the immediate (in-law) family and the larger community were not topics discussed in the early Perestroika years. Saba Mahmood's interpretation of religious women in the late 1990s Egyptian mosque movement, studied endurance with the "higher aim" of women. She argued that these women accept their fates and cultivate endurance; they are 'docile subjects' to use her term, because they believe they are divinely

[116] O. Mirzajonova, "Bardoshli Bo´ling Opajonlar!," *Lenin Yo'li,* March 31, 1990, 3.

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appointed.[117] While the Uzbek ladies in the analyzed articles did not mention God, they did believe it was their *taqdir* (destiny), which may or may not have religious connotations.

In her piece *Thoughts in Front of a Big Yield*, published in the January 1990 issue of *Saodat*, U. Otaeva presents another perspective for rural women who were trapped by hard working conditions. She believed that cotton farmers simply did not have time to rest or reflect on their meager earnings.

She contacted two cotton pickers in Uzbekistan's Bog'ot region, who confirmed that they did not receive wheat, sugar, or sweets despite exceeding their production targets. When one of the ladies stated that her family received two pieces of soap per month for nine people, she hesitated to reveal how much soap can be generated from the cotton she picks because she recognized that these women, as ordinary farmers, merely did their work and had no idea about the rest. Otaeva observed their exhausted expressions over a cup of tea at sunset and concluded that they barely had time to stop and reflect on societal concerns because they had to work in the fields during the day, run their homes, do house chores, water the garden, and look after their orchards, sometimes looking after children or doing these things together when they are old enough to help. The fact that she did not encourage these women to take action against the injustice she perceived they were facing demonstrates both her empathy and how hopeless she perceived the situation to be. She returned without asking the questions she intended to ask and instead published them alongside these women's photos in Saodat. This could help the magazine's readers become more aware and self-conscious.

The above examples demonstrate that *Saodat's* employees, although they worked for a state-controlled magazine, were able to communicate their concerns in a way that was acceptable

[117] Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202–36.

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to their community and readers throughout the Perestroika years, taking cultural norms into account and reflecting on them. This demonstrates the continuity of Soviet women's magazines' commitment to support their readers by raising their concerns and guiding them, as one of the editors of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* stated in the interview I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The fact that both reporters did not ask direct questions, either to avoid hurting the women's feelings or because they believed it would be inconvenient for them, demonstrates how sensitive the magazines' employees were to societal norms. This was the case for women's magazines in the Soviet Union's European and Asian parts, as demonstrated by Omanova, and it lasted until the end of Perestroika.

Figure 13 A cotton picker, Saodat, March 1990

Anti Tobacco Campaign in Kyrgyzstan and hard working conditions at textile factories

By the mid 1980s cigarette production in the USSR had fallen as it had adopted a wide range of anti-smoking policies, including a prohibition on cigarette advertising, a restriction on

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smoking in restaurants, warnings on cigarette packaging about the dangers of smoking, and anti-smoking media campaigns.[118] As tobacco cultivation was an important sector of agriculture in Kyrgyzstan and the Perestroika reforms advocated for a tobacco ban, this issue received public attention during this period. Following the same trend, *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* regularly addressed the harm of smoking to women's health, arguing that it harms women's health more than men's. In February 1990, it published an article, *Tobacco and a Woman´s Health: Or Let´s Get Rid of This Disease*, by a medical doctor, director of the obstetrics and pediatrics research institute A. Ilín, who tried to portray the negative impact of smoking on women's health. She cites several international studies and World Health Organization statistics to argue for the harmful effects of tobacco on the body. The doctor cites a study from 1985 by her institution on the harm of tobacco cultivation in women. According to these findings, a thousand women working in tobacco cultivation had 1275 gynecological diseases, whereas a thousand women who did not engage in tobacco growth had 240 gynecological diseases.[119] They included menstrual cycle dysfunction (38%), sexual maturity growth slowing (36%), inflammatory processes (20%), proclivity for swelling of the genital organs (28%), and infertility (11%). Miscarriage during pregnancy among women working in tobacco cultivation was 3.5% greater, as was heavier toxicosis; the newborn death rate was 1.5-2 % higher compared to women who were not involved in tobacco cultivation. She ends her article by noting the directives of the Kirghiz SSR Council of Ministries prohibiting the involvement of women and children in tobacco cultivation and the storage of tobacco leaves inside households in processing the yield.[120]

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[118] Dr Anna BC Gilmore, "Tobacco and Transition: Understanding the Impact of Transition on Tobacco Use and Control in the Former Soviet Union" (London, University of London, 2005), 39.

[119] A. Ilín, "Tameki Jana Ayaldyn Den Soolugu: Je Kelgile Bul Ildetten Arylaly," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, February 1990, 17.

[120] Ilín, 17.

In the same issue of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, a success story of a woman in corn cultivation is depicted. Compared to tobacco production, engagement in corn production is depicted as a positive and promising field if a person is committed to work. Ravza Egemberdieva from Ala Buka region of Osh province managed to get 220 percent profit with her team at the Young Komsomols Brigade in 1988.[121] While the journalist did not interview Ravza and instead referred to the stories of the head and the accountant, it is reasonable to assume that the magazine was attempting to promote less hazardous agricultural activities among its readers. Subsequently, as a result of a decrease in state subsidies for tobacco farming, most of the farmers opted for other types of crops, including corn cultivation.

In 1990, *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* established a section called *Meaningful Conversations,* where they published interviews with different people about the working conditions of women in the textile industry in Bishkek. Most of the depictions of work at textile factories in the words of the management personnel were positive, stating the achievements of the team while stating minor difficulties with obtaining the necessary commodities. For instance, the minister of light industry, Servei Rubskiy, portrayed a favorable picture of the industry in his interview with the reporter of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary,* by stating the profit being made after shifting to a contract-based labor structure. The factories were outperforming the plans, whereas women could earn more by working more hours. The journalist wanted to know about the likely switch to two shifts as well as the potential closure of textile factories in the midst of substantial restructuring, rising costs, and a lack of adequate equipment. However, according to the minister, the state was unable to construct new industries to hire the proportion of working women, making the switch to a two-shift schedule impractical for economic reasons. The main problem for him was acquiring the

[121] M. Bekmuratov, "Synaluu Jolunda," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, February 1990, 21.

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necessary equipment in the factories to keep up with the work.[122] In order to gain a perspective from the workers, the same reporter from *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary,* went to the dormitory of one of the worst factories in Bishkek. Women complained of lack of sleep due to the three-shift schedule and having to work on the weekend in order to reach the factory's goals. The living conditions were also devastating, with long lines in the kitchen and bathroom equipment that was only half functional. There were women who had worked at the factory for twenty years with no hope of receiving subsidized housing. Another single mother worker had her three children in the village at three different relatives' places due to the lack of space in the dormitory. The reporter asked the manager of the dormitory, "What would happen if a girl got pregnant and gave birth to a child?" As the dormitory was not intended for women with infants, the manager indicated they would not be able to support her and that she would have to vacate the space. Some young women claimed they were forced to choose factory labor after failing the university admission exam, and if given a chance, they would leave.[123] This kind of narration, different from early Perestroika images of factories that focused on the experiences of successful women laborers, first appeared in 1990. It is told from the viewpoint of random factory workers, as the reporter met these women leaving the factory early in the morning after their night shift and leaving for their dormitories. This shows how Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary started expanding its focus from covering successful stories to investigating the real conditions in the factories.

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[122] "Abalyn Qanday Ayal Jumushchu?," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, 1990, 8.
[123] A. Haydarova, "Jumushchu Kyzdardyn Ich Küptüülörü," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, 1990, 29.

Finding and Creating Opportunities

Along with the hardships following the decentralization of central economic planning and the state's turn towards market economies and democratization, some new opportunities emerged for women. In January 1987, Gorbachev launched another set of reforms aimed at political change, which were named *demokratizatsiya* (democratization) as a strategy to bypass the conservative Party elite, which opposed the Perestroika and Glasnost reforms. While still maintaining the one-party communist state, these reforms created opportunities for national republics to meet local needs. It led to the 1977 Soviet Constitution being modified in December 1988 to establish the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD) as a new legislative body to replace the previous Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. For women in the national republics, political reforms opened new doors for political and governmental participation. Being elected as national delegates gave women the opportunity to push for legislation that addressed the specific needs and issues that affected women in their local communities. The Congress of the People's Deputies established a Committee on Women's Affairs (women's committee), through which women (in the national republics) channeled their requests to the CPD. Uzbek women delegates were able to utilize their membership in the committee to lobby for laws that specifically addressed the needs and difficulties of women in Uzbekistan, such as lobbying for establishing a weekly day off for herdswomen and paid leave. Delegates such as Halima Alimova were able to change the date of the law's implementation on extending maternity leave to three years and the length of financial support during this period to one and a half years in collaboration with the Uzbek women's committee and trade unions. The initiative was initially accepted but would have to be enforced in Central Asian countries in 1991 until Central Asian representatives requested that it be changed to 1990, which was accepted.[124]

[124] Sanát Mahmudova, "Xalqim Tashvishlari — Mening Tashvishlarim: O'zbekiston Kasaba Soyuzlari Respublika Sovetining Raisi, SSSR Xalq Deputati Halima Alimova Bilan Suhbat," *Saodat,* April 1990, 35.

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An article on Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary from June 1991, titled *At the Soviet Women's Committee: Current Times and the Women*, depicts the same endeavors by Communist Party-affiliated women. They published a detailed explanation of the allowances available to Kyrgyz women under the law on the protection of motherhood.[125]

By the late Perestroika years, more women from rural areas were writing their concerns to *Saodat*, which the editors published with their comments. The letters contained the requests of these women to publish their concerns because they hoped to attract the attention of state bodies. The comments of the editors to these requests demonstrated their concerns about the conditions of women in the villages where there was no gas, infrastructure, or transportation. With Glasnost and discussions about wages, *Saodat* published a letter from herdswomen and farmers in July 1990 who asked why they were paid 70–100 sums whereas women in city factories were getting about 300 sums. The letter said that women in the villages were forced to take their children to the fields due to the lack of kindergartens and walk several kilometers a day as there was no public transportation. In cases where their voices were heard and these issues were addressed, they followed up with the editors to express their gratitude and content. Thus, even though women in Uzbekistan did not organize themselves into a feminist movement, with the introduction of *demokratizatsiya,* they used the state-established organs to increase awareness about their conditions, and through delegates and magazine channels, their requests, to the extent possible in the realities of Perestroika, were addressed.

At the same time, textile factories in cities were changing, despite the fact that their working conditions had always been better than those of agricultural women. In some cases, textile factories were able to adapt to political and economic changes. Textile factories, like the

[125] "Sovet Ayaldar Komitetinde: Azyrky Uchur Jana Ayaldar," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, 1991, 6.

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Komsomol textile factory in Bishkek, were one of them. The leadership organized complex support for its employees, such as providing dormitories and assistance in enrolling children in kindergartens, health check-ups, vouchers to sanatoriums, and tourist vouchers to travel to cities such as St. Petersburg and Tashkent. Despite the economic downturn, the factory doubled its output in 1990 compared to 1986. This was due to women beginning to work full-time at the factory and earning more by sticking to the plan and receiving extra pay. The main challenge was dealing with textile shortages at times, equipment breakdowns, and difficulties mastering the new French equipment, which did not threaten the factory's overall operation. This depiction differs from the wurst factory in Bishkek mentioned earlier in that, the article did not cite workers' accounts, which could have been different. The Osh "50th anniversary of the October Revolution" plant specializing in the production of textiles from cotton, which employed 8500 women, is another example of a company maintaining work and support for women workers in times of economic hardship. It had its own kindergartens and healthcare facilities and regularly organized cultural activities for its workers and their children. There was a dedicated sector in the plant responsible for organizing various competitions among workers, such as *Yr Kese, Qana Emese Qyzdar, Hozyayushka,* and celebrations of official holidays. Both companies were profit-oriented organizations and therefore viewed the marketization reforms positively. They focused on improving the quality and increasing the volume of production to stay in the market. The few women who took up entrepreneurship as a pragmatic reaction, which, in many cases, turned into a lifelong activity after independence. Because they were initially commercial enterprises, the textile industry appeared to have adapted to market-oriented realities. While flexible contracts have contributed to the industry's growth and increased income for women, we do not have the voices of the workers-women to compare the assumed success.

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The cases of self-immolation in rural Uzbekistan in the 1990s

Another topic discussed in the articles connected to work and economic and political changes was the issue of self-immolation among women in rural Uzbekistan during the Perestroika years. Self-immolation is a type of self-harm in which a person intentionally sets herself on fire to express her disapproval of or to bring attention to a certain issue. In this section, I first review secondary literature on women's suicidal acts as a way to communicate their concerns and as the only possible way to be heard, according to Gayatri Spivak's conceptualization. I continue to review the secondary literature on Uzbek women's suicide cases before moving on to the analysis of my sources. A few articles on the pages of *Saodat* highlighted women's suicide acts, but they were all concerned about the causes of this tragedy. It is worth noting that, in contrast to *Sadoat*, newspapers in Russian based in Moscow covered the cases of self-immolation. The Uzbek press's representations differed from the Moscow-based newspapers' portrayals.

In her seminal work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak, studying the historical context of the *sati* (self-immolation) practice of Indian widows, argued that the representational mechanisms and power structures of colonialism and patriarchy often silence subaltern voices, making it challenging for them to articulate their experiences and perspectives.[126] Spivak criticized essentialist conceptions of sati, arguing for a more complex understanding of agency and representational constraints.[127] She contended that, while some Indian women chose self-immolation, it is critical to remember that agency is intimately shaped by social, cultural, and economic pressures.[128] While my sources do not allow me to center the Uzbek women in the explanation of the driving factors of self-immolation cases, I can critically review their

[126] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Routledge, 1994), 103.
[127] Spivak, 104.
[128] Spivak, 104.

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representations in *Saodat* and in *Lenin Yo´li* (an article discussing self-immolation cases in Osh) and juxtapose them to the representation in Russian language and Moscow based newspapers covering the topic.

Among the few authors who have written about this problem, Dilarom Alimova and Nodira Azimova in 1999 noted that, while there had been incidents before, self-immolation among Uzbek women rose in the Perestroika years, particularly in rural areas.[129] According to Elithabeth Ann Canpbell, studying the reasons for such practice among the rural women of Uzbekistan in the late 1990s, states that "domestic abuse and harsh lifestyles of the rural villages (*qishloqs*) culture were the main motivating factors."[130] Canpbell looked into the role of Islam and the symbolic value the use of fire could have in the choices of women who attempted suicide but survived. Her research discovered that religion had no influence and that the use of fire was merely a convenience.[131]

Saodat did not discuss the self-immolation cases in-depth with concrete examples but rather commented on them as a general phenomenon present at the time. Different authors demonstrated different understandings of the factors pushing women to this extreme option. Nurali Qobul, a young poet, for example, believed men were to blame for women's suffering in the fields in fifty-degree heat.[132] In his article *Qarzdorlik Hissi* (The Feeling of Indebtedness) from the July 1988 issue of *Saodat*, he wrote that men were to blame for sending their wives to work in the cotton fields under extreme weather conditions without proper protection or care. From a patriarchal standpoint, he believed that men should protect women, which they were not doing adequately. He saw economic difficulties as the result of men's mismanagement, which caused

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[129] Alimova and Azimova, "Women's Position in Uzbekistan Before and After Independence," 294.

[130] Elithabeth Ann Canpbell, "Perspectives on Self-Immolation Experiences Among Uzbek Women" (University of Tennesse - Knoxville, 2005), 1, https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1893.

[131] Canpbell, 3.

[132] Nurali Qobul, "Qarzdorlik Hissi," *Saodat*, 1988, 7.

women to suffer. While he did express an apology to the women who passed away and were still suffering in cotton fields, he did not offer any solutions. Muhammad Solih, another prominent Uzbek poet known for his outright criticism of the party leadership during the Perestroika years,[133] regularly contributed to the magazine every time he raised the issue of the difficult working conditions in the cotton fields.[134] In his piece *Ayollarga Sog´liq Bering* (Give Health to Women) in the July 1990 issue of *Saodat*, he blamed the centralized state for setting unrealistic plans with insufficient wages. He claimed that the unrealistic level of plans and the pressure to meet them forced the local elite to exploit the rural population. As a result, women's health and living conditions deteriorated, causing some to take extreme actions like suicide to end their sufferings.[135]

In a 1991 interview with *Saodat*, Surkhandaryo regional Women's Committee leader Buritosh Shodieva recognized the nominal nature of district-level Women's Committees when asked about the growing cases of female self-immolation. She worried that because the committee's head was usually a doctor, a school principal, or someone in another profession, she would be unable to follow up on issues affecting women in her region due to her other obligations. She stated that they usually arrived only after a tragic incident occurred, and that some of them were unknown to the residents of the districts. She thought the Women's Committee should have more members in a region where women make up 51% of the population. She was critical of some women asking for help from "other people." She said some women turned to other people because they did not have people willing to listen to their concerns and help. [136] She could be referring to

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[133] He became politically active in the mid 1980s and during the post-independence years. He left the country due to increased government repression and an arrest in 1993. His supporters are still active in and outside of the country.

[134] Muhammad Solih, "Ayollarga Sog'liq Bering," *Saodat*, April 1990, 7.

[135] Muhammad Solih, 8.

[136] Usmanova, "Yo'llar Yo'llarga Tutash: Surxondaryo Viloyati Xotin-Qizlar Qo'mitasi Raisi Bo'ritosh Shodiyeva Bilan Suhbat," 13.

Moscow journalists, as the case of a woman publishing her story in Pravda sparked widespread interest in Moscow and Central Asia.

At the same time, suicide cases caught the attention of the Moscow-based press when a lady who survived the self-immolation act wrote a letter to *Pravda Vostoka* with the hope of restoring her dignity in the eyes of her society. The Moscow press reported cases possibly reaching 270 in 1988.[137] The contents of the 1988 news articles from Moscow in the Blinken OSA collection demonstrate that the incidents were portrayed as a result of the prevailing "feudal mentality" of Uzbeks. All articles discussing the incidents criticized the Uzbek administration for not fighting the "*perejitki baymanapstvo*" (endurance of patriarchal) past and saw it as the cause of corruption "rooted in the Uzbek culture." Most of the articles stated the *baymanap* (feudal) culture forcing women to marry for *kalyn* (bridal price),[138] "despotic family members and husbands who would not give young women freedom,"[139] "low psychological resistance of women from villages involved in the industry,"[140] as causes of the incident without going into a more detailed analysis of economic conditions and the hunger and exploitation of women in cotton fields. The following excerpt from *Selskaya Industria* exemplifies the stereotypical view of Uzbeks and Uzbek women held by Moscow-based journalists:

> The reasons for such tragedies are in the family, which is rooted in the feudal understanding of women and sees them as inferior objects," says I. Ganieva. It is because of exhausting house chores, endless child deliveries, an exhausted young body, forced marriage, paying for a bridal dowry, living with someone whom you don't love, the despotic parents of the husband and his own despotism, diet as in the years of hunger, and being locked up in the circle of one's family.[141]

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[137] Dilbar Mahmudova, "V Zamknutom Krugu," *Pravda Vostoka*, February 25, 1988, 1, HU OSA 300-85-12 #267, Blinken OSA.
[138] Dilbar Mahmudova, 1.
[139] "Znaki Bedy," *Selskaya Industria*, October 20, 1988, 1, HU OSA 300-85-12 #267, Blinken OSA.
[140] "Znaki Bedy," 1.
[141] "Znaki Bedy," 1.

Citing the local prosecutor and Ferghana city party secretary, commenting on the tragic case of Rano Rustamova, stated the oppression by her in-laws and her husband as a cause of her suicide. The journalist agreed with the reasons stated and added one more cause, which according to her was the "low psychological resistance of women from villages involved in the industry."[142] She was critical of "responsible" people who had to create better conditions for Uzbek women and asked rhetorical questions about who should take responsibility for Rano's and dozens of other women's suicides in the same factory. While it is not possible to confirm or disprove the numbers this journalist mentioned, it is clear that she tried to raise awareness among the readers of *Selskaya Industria* about these tragic incidents in Fergana city. From the article, we learn that Rano's husband physically assaulted her for buying sandals for their daughters from her salary without his permission. While the husband's treatment was depicted as the last straw for Rano, we do not learn about many other victims reported in the press; in some cases, the physical abuse was absent. What was the connection between their decisions and the wider economic hardship and stagnation in late Soviet society? It is clear, however, that some Uzbek women faced enormous hardships that drove them to commit suicide and were never given the opportunity to explain their plight. Furthermore, the journalist's native Uzbek language demonstrates how local correspondents of the Russian press adopted the language and reproduced Moscow's discourse on "backwardness" at a national level. This shows the Russian language press in Tashkent kept the party rhetoric of the peripheries being "backward," whereas the Uzbek language press was "signaling" about the drawbacks of the center.

Rabotnitsa, the prominent Russian Soviet women's magazine, took a more critical stance on the issue, interviewing Adil Yakobov (also spelled as Oqil Yoqubov), a prominent Uzbek writer

[142] "Znaki Bedy," 1.

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who quit his party membership in protest of the rising number of female suicides. As other studies have revealed, Yakubov actively criticized the failures of the Uzbek elite and party leadership during Perestroika.[143] He used the example of a young girl who had to drop out of school to pick cotton to feed her family but who was exploited and manipulated by the leader of the cotton-picking brigade and eventually burned herself to death. According to him, the stagnating economic situation forced women into exploitative conditions in the cotton industry due to widespread corruption. The following passage demonstrates his understanding of the situation:

> I am convinced that the root causes of this tragedy lie primarily in the exploitation of women's labor and in social injustice. [...] It is easy to blame the holdovers of feudal thinking and neglect the real-life conditions. Each of these women needs not only a criminal investigation but also a social investigation. We have to study the social and economic causes of this phenomenon.[144]

The social investigation that Yakubov mentioned connects with the social expectations of resilience and endurance from women in Central Asian communities that I highlighted earlier. It could imply examining the impact that societal pressure to keep up with the hardships on top of the economic collapse could have had on the most disadvantaged women in the country. Calls for *sbar* (endurance) as part of these expectations while intending for a long term reward for endurance undermine the level of difficulty a person may be experiencing. This kind of general attitude towards hardships made some women insensitive to the conditions of others, as in the example of *Let´s Be Patient Sisters!* which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. After highlighting the tension between a mother-in-law and a young bride, Otajonova in an article on *Lenin Yo'li,* mentioned the cases of self-immolation in Osh and claimed this is due to women becoming less patient despite improved living conditions. This more conservative point of view shows how

[143] Khalid, *Central Asia. [Electronic Resource]*, 404.

[144] Irina Juravskya, "Teni Proshlye I Nastoyashie," *Rabotnitsa*, August 1988, HU OSA 300-85-12 #267, Blinken OSA.

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perplexed people were during the transformation times. Yakubov went on to describe the economic hardships and hazardous working conditions in rural Uzbekistan, which fit into the larger picture described by Alimova and Canpbell. But his voice was one of the few that appeared. The presence of incidents of Uzbek women committing suicide in the Blinken OSA archives of news articles from the late Perestroika years in Uzbekistan indicates how widespread the phenomenon may have been and, as a result, how widely covered it was by the Moscow press. I was unable to obtain access to the true number of victims. However, the lack of other news about Uzbek women created an image of extremely oppressed women who were exploited or abused to death. On the pages of *Selskaya Industria, Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and even *Rabotnitsa*, we do not learn about the deeper causes of the tragedy or the stories of other Uzbek women who survived the state collapse and eventually made their way to entrepreneurship and as delegates to Moscow.

The 1990s Moscow coverage of the Uzbek self-immolation cases, portraying them as consequences of continuing cases of feudal *bai manap* (richman from feudal times), resembles the Bolshevik efforts to eliminate feudalism and alter Central Asian society in the 1930s. Earlier research emphasized how the Soviet regime's portrayal of feudal holdovers as impediments to progress and agents of tyranny was a major component of the official narratives propagated by the Soviet state about peripheral republics.[145] The campaign against the feudal structure, on the other hand, was central to Moscow's policies and campaigns during collectivization and land redistribution, and, to a lesser extent, later periods.[146] While there was no central state agenda in place during Perestroika to eradicate holdovers of patriarchal society in Central Asia, the examples

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[145] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. [Electronic Resource]: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 198.

[146] Fitzpatrick, 198.

above demonstrate how some Moscow-based journalists continued to portray Central Asians as backward and patriarchal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how work was portrayed in Kyrgyz and Uzbek women's lives in local women's periodicals and in some selected articles in the Moscow-based press during the early and late Perestroika years.

I first analyzed the depiction of women during the early Perestroika years as laborers, acknowledging their achievements under the Soviet state and how they balanced work and motherhood with determination. Uzbek and Kyrgyz were primarily portrayed as agricultural laborers who had overcome a "dark past" and had to be "thankful" to the Soviet state. They were also depicted as building their lives in accordance with the state's priorities, which were agricultural production in Central Asia. We get limited insider insight into the hard working conditions at work in this period of Perestroika. In contrast to *Rabotnisa* in Moscow, *Saodat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* did not criticize the state for "unfulfilling the promise," instead focusing on encouraging women to dedicate themselves to overcoming hardships, the reward for which would be “promotion” by state and community recognition.

I then examined articles from the late Perestroika years in which *Saodat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* took a critical tone. After the censorship was lifted with Glasnost, articles in both magazines focused on exploitative working conditions, such as cocoon and cotton production in Uzbekistan and wurst and textile factories in Kyrgyzstan. Some women committed suicide for reasons not fully covered by the magazines, but some of the reasons given were economic hardships and exploitative conditions in rural Uzbekistan.

At the same time, articles in both magazines depicted the efforts of women affiliated with the party in advancing women's rights in the central leadership and writing comprehensive explanations of new laws aimed at supporting motherhood and protecting children. These laws may have contributed to the promotion of motherhood and family values in the Central Asian press during the late years of Perestroika, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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Chapter 3: Women and Nation

> If we could just feel for a moment that this land is our land, If the word *Vatan* (homeland) wasn't just a word for us,
>
> if we could love this land and these people the way we love ourselves or our *mansab* (ranks) and *manfaat* (benefits),
>
> We would not appear in such a helpless situation. Muhammad Solih, Uzbek poet, political activist and dissident[147]

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the issue of the *national question* as represented in *Saodat, Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary,* and *Lenin Yo'li,* understood here as renewed interest in cultural heritage, demands for greater autonomy, and women as keepers of cultural values and reproducers of nations as described in the articles during 1990-1991. I first briefly outline the overall historical context of the time and the political projects of nationhood that emerged by the end of Perestroika. Then, using Nira Yuval-Devis' concept of "women as reproducers of nations," I examine the ways women's magazines discussed motherhood as the primary role of women. Both women's periodicals and the general press portrayed women as mothers, moral and cultural heritage keepers, as well as promoters of greater Uzbekness and Kyrgyzness in that they encouraged their readers to master the native languages (in addition to Russian or not being ashamed of not being able to speak Russian), wear traditional clothes more often, and lead customary celebrations by integrating national celebrations into Soviet holidays to popularize them among people.

In the context of the broader economic and political chaos, and the resulting social disorientation, I argue that motherhood and "morality" became notable issues discussed in the women's press as a way of recognizing women's contributions to maintaining social stability and

[147] Muhammad Solih, "Ayollarga Sog'liq Bering," 7.

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the thriving of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek nations. While national identities as state categories were formed during the Soviet era, Glasnost provided greater freedom to the press, which contributed to diversifying standardized depictions of history and culture by publishing articles about national history, celebrations, and language.

Nationalism in Central Asia and in the Soviet Union at Large during the Perestroika Years

With the Stalinist regime persecuting opposition groups and intellectuals with national projects for greater Turkestan in the 1930s, Central Asia witnessed no more major upheaval against Soviet ideology. By the time Gorbachev initiated reforming socialism, people throughout the region had developed lifestyles that fused cultural values with Soviet modernity, in which Soviet identity coexisted with the national one. In the Soviet Union, nationality was understood in primordial terms, and people developed an essentialized understanding of nationality, in which every nation had its own traditions, food, and cultural specificities. In fact, Central Asian countries were shaped as political entities throughout the Soviet era and got most of their current territories and borders during the same era. Nonetheless, the loosening of political control allowed for increased public expression and debates about the ways national distinctiveness should guide societal life, as evidenced by the topics covered in the Central Asian press during the Perestroika years. *Saodat* interviewed some of the pro-independence political activists who saw the problem of Soviet Uzbekistan in the reluctance of the party elite to change as well as the failure of the intelligentsia to mobilize for political reforms. As Martin McCauley wrote in *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union: 1917-1991* a complex interplay of economic crises, nationalist movements, and

political struggles within the ruling elite led to the demise of the Soviet Union.[148] For the purpose of this thesis, the nationalist factor mentioned above is especially interesting. Nationalist debates in the major regions of the Union desired greater political autonomy and decision-making power for their republics, while some, particularly in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), advocated for complete independence.[149] It is, however, crucial to highlight that the objectives, intensity, and methods of nationalist expressions and feelings varied throughout the Soviet republics, with Central Asians demonstrating more reserved and careful steps.[150] Even so, these were difficult times for Central Asians, as the desire for more autonomy was accompanied by interethnic and intercommunal conflicts that broke out in some of the region's republics, as well as political demonstrations in the Kazakh city of Zheltoksan as early as 1986, the Alma-Ata Protests in 1989, and numerous other demonstrations in the Ferghana Valley. The republics' fates have also been described as "unwanted independence," referring to the last referendum of March 1991, in which 92% of the Kyrgyz party elite and 95% of the Uzbek elite voted in favor of the preservation of the Soviet Union. However, one should note that there has been no extensive study of pro-independence groups and political organizations that emerged at the time, such as the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK) founded in 1990, the Birlik (unity) Movement of Uzbekistan established in 1988, and the Erk Democratic Party founded in 1990. One of the stated reasons for the ruling elite not favoring dissolution was their desire to keep their status and beneficial conditions.[151]

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[148] Martin McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* (Harlow, England, New York: Longman, 2008), 11.

[149] Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 11.

[150] Central Asia Program, "Looking Back on Central Asia's Perestroika: Political Narratives and Political Mobilization," n.d., accessed June 8, 2023.

[151] Muhammad Solih, "Ayollarga Sog'liq Bering," 7.

The Central Asian press during Perestroika followed the general trend throughout the country calling for greater political recognition and autonomy, reinterpreting the past in national terms. Occasionally, there were articles calling for the native population's active political participation. For instance, in an interview with *Saodat* in January 1990, the leader of the pro-independence party Erk in Uzbekistan, Muhammad Solih, claimed that local Communist party leaders were responsible for the ecological devastation in the Aral Sea and its effects on the population's health. He argued that they were primarily concerned about securing their own ranks and benefiting from their central networks, and that there was no real reform happening in the republic. According to him, the Uzbek intelligentsia and writers had also failed to publicly discuss the plight of common people living in poverty and demand greater rights. In fact, he believed that a handful of writers were insufficient to awaken the corrupt elite, and that the time had come for regular *xalq* (people) to stand up for their rights and democratic rule. He also criticized the Uzbek media, including the press, radio, and television, for falling short of the Central (Moscow-based) media in terms of Glasnost. According to him, newspapers published similar articles and were not independent; they did not dare to argue with each other in their attempt "not to harm anyone,"[152] meaning the journalists were afraid to criticize each other.

Solih continued with examples from *Pravda Vostoka*, a Russian language Tashkent-based newspaper, about women. Previously, *Pravda Vostoka* would extensively write about the excessive births among Uzbek women, and lately, the same newspaper started asking, "Does excessive birth lead to economic collapse?" These kinds of depictions assumed that women with several children were the causes of economic collapse. He used another example with "excessive birth" from a *Pravda Vostoka* article for the same year, according to which "the rapid increase of

[152] Muhammad Solih, 7.

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the population causes many to become busy at households, with workers opting for private contracts, leading to a decrease in the income for a family."[153] But to him, they missed the fact that when children grow up and become workers, they will contribute to the family budget. "When our children grow up and start working," he said, "no one will tell us that our republic is now in debt or that we are eating from the budgets of other republics." In this passage, Solih alluded to the Moscow propaganda of the time, which claimed that the republics were dependent on the budget of Moscow and had not given their fair share to support the Soviet state. Issues of the Moscow-based *Komsomolskaya Pravda* for 1988 indeed regularly discussed the issue of republics not being able to properly conduct Perestroika. Some examples included allegations of failing to end corruption in the cotton industry and Uzbekistan being the fastest growing population republic in the Soviet Union and thus a burden to Moscow.[154]

In relation to the issue of rapid population growth, a journalist from *Pravda Vostoka* asked some women and men in Namangan province of Uzbekistan why they had many children, to which these people replied, "The more children, the better." The journalist came to the conclusion that these people needed a "new *hujum*." Solih wondered whether the anxiety about excessive childbirth was connected with women's health.[155] But the reporter of *Pravda Vostoka* did not mention it. Instead, Solih found information about its impact on women's health in another article in *Pravda Vostoka*. It stated that rising anemia cases were due to extensive birth but Solih believed it was due to the ecological devastation in the country.[156] While raising serious hardships at the time, these discussions between political activists and journalists demonstrate how both Moscow and nationalist movements in Uzbekistan were referring to women's health issues as the failure of

[153] Muhammad Solih, 7.
[154] Muhammad Solih, 8.
[155] Muhammad Solih, 8.
[156] Muhammad Solih, 9.

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the state, replacement of which was seen as a solution. Solih was pointing at Moscow´s negative attitude towards the republics and interpreting the articles about excessive childbirth as a way to control the growth of the Uzbek nation. For him, population growth, on the other hand, meant a larger workforce in Uzbekistan, leading to greater self-sustainability. He was convinced that the intentions of the first article he cited were not to benefit women's health, citing the reporter's failure to discuss the impact of multiple births on health issues. These depictions of women as vulnerable or trapped in problems that should be solved are similar to how Bolshevik rule envisioned Central Asian women playing a central role in building socialist state order; nation-centric groups and reemerging national projects saw women's condition as central to their projects.

Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary, on the other hand, did not discuss the political projects of nationhood, be they student protests in Bishkek in 1989 or the activities of the DMK. This may have been because of the nature of the magazine, which covered primarily socio-economic issues related to women. However, the journal used to highlight the accomplishments of party women on a regular basis, and there were young women involved in democratic movements that it dismissed. Zamira Sydykova, a well-known female activist, was a student at the time and was inspired by nationalist sentiments in Moscow to join the Bishkek student protests. In the post-independence period, Sadykova became the founder and chief editor of the first independent newspaper, *Res Publica*, and served as an ambassador of Kyrgyzstan in Canada.[157]

Central Asian Women as Mothers and Renewed Emphasis on Family Centric Values

As Yuval-Davis demonstrates in *Gender & Women*, nationalist ideologies support gendered images of nations that assign specific tasks to men and women, depriving the latter of meaningful participation in public life. Women are particularly vulnerable in the context of regime

[157] Central Asia Program, "Video - Looking Back on Central Asia's Perestroika."

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change and economic collapse.[158] In line with this explanation, my research suggests that the Central Asian press promoted a gendered image of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz nations, allocating motherhood to women to reproduce the nation and to men the role of "protectors" of the nation.[159] However, I argue that Central Asian women portrayed in the press were not always or only victims of patriarchal oppression or instruments of state socialism. Rather, they negotiated their interests as women and as members of nations emerging from the Soviet experiment as a political project. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the early years of Perestroika, Central Asian women were portrayed as supporters of the Soviet system, which provided them with education, social support with child care, and waged work. They were portrayed in the later Perestroika years as women who disassociated work from the state and were trapped in exploitative conditions while some economic and political opportunities emerged. As this chapter shows, some women supported the nationalist ideologies of reviving religion and embracing motherhood as articulated in the articles of the Central Asian press. But in doing so, I argue that they negated the stereotype of women being passive, and perhaps most tellingly, they acted flexibly to adapt to new realities and (re)invent new roles in the emerging market economy and nation centric states. It is, however, important to note that this renewed emphasis on motherhood and family centric values was happening within the broader Soviet context, with a number of laws to "protect motherhood and family" being adopted in the Center. Both periodicals repeatedly stated that the reforms supported motherhood. Thus, in the review of the XIXth All Union Party Conference from March 1990, *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* stated that family support was one of the main agendas of the meeting and

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[158] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), 7.
[159] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), 15.

of the Perestroika reforms.[160] Equally, *Saodat* published information about renewed child support conditions, which included longer maternity leave and payment for the second child.[161]

In this broader context, the gendered images of women in the press were increasing in 1990. While women's journals were writing about the hard working conditions with the aim of raising awareness of issues and getting them solved, *Lenin Yo'li* took a radical approach by calling women to leave their jobs and prioritize motherhood. Mirzohid Mirzarahimov, for example, argued that women should "return women to their prestigious place of motherhood that existed before socialism."[162] In another article in *Lenin Yo'li* from 1991, the letter of a female reader, Hanifahon Soliboeva, described her reactions to an article published in the previous issue of the newspaper. In the letter, Soliboeva agreed with the article, which claimed that women were losing their attractiveness and their beauty as they joined men in feeding their families in the face of increasing prices. This account is of an urban woman who was not informed about the working conditions in rural areas. She thought prices for goods were rising because of the transition to the market economy and that men's wages were no longer enough to feed children. She wondered why the state bodies did not take measures to control the prices and wished men would earn enough money for women to be able to stay home and raise children. She ended her letter by wishing women to stay beautiful and not forget about their femininity and womanness.[163] This is an example of a conservative understanding of the social order and of gender roles. For Soliboeva, women represented the private sphere as she emphasized the child-bearing and child-rearing potential of women, while men should be breadwinners, and the fact that society did not enable

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[160] "Kün Tartibinde Üy-Bülö," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, April 1990, 30.
[161] "Muhim Vazifalar Oldida," 1.
[162] Mirzohid Mirzarahimov, "Qizim Senga Aytaman," *Lenin Yo'li*, March 8, 1990, sec. Odobnoma, 4.
[163] Hanifahon Soliboeva, "Ayollarga Go´zallik Tilayman," *Lenin Yo'li*, March 16, 1991, 3.

these standards made her upset. Additionally, for her, “womanhood” was associated with beauty. The fact that Soliboeva saw work as something hard and difficult and therefore undesirable goes against the majority of women in the 1990s portrayed in women's magazines, who stayed at work despite the difficulties. This suggests she either lacked competencies or associated labor with physical work, but it also shows the preferences of the editors of *Lenin Yo'li*, who opted for representing more conservative views in the late Perestroika years.

The above-mentioned article by Mirzarahimov from March 1990 was a congratulatory message to women on the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8, 1990. After wishing women happiness, he went on to claim that women's role in life should primarily be motherhood and instructed them on how to dress and behave in public spaces. He started off his article by asking if there was real equality between men and women in Osh society. To answer his question, he referred to history and Islam, both of which he claimed treat men and women equally. Historically, men such as “Socrates, Navo’i, Babur, Saadi, Stendhal, and Tolstoy all praised women, whereas men of the present made women workers and sent them to the field.”[164] He referred to agricultural women when he said "send women to the field," as women in Osh were actively involved in cotton production as well as working in tobacco fields. However, reviewing the articles on the pages of *Lenin Yo’li*, I did not find articles with women's testimonies about their work. While it is true that women experienced hardships in the fields and it was discussed in women’s magazines, Mirzarahimov used this fact to urge women to leave their jobs. He acknowledged that there were teachers, doctors, scientists, and artists among women, but for him, there were only a few.[165] Central Asian republics being agrarian countries, it is true that women

[164] Mirzarahimov, “Qizim Senga Aytaman,” 4.
[165] Mirzarahimov, 4.

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who pursued higher education were proportionally less than the women involved in agriculture. In his view,

> A woman is primarily a MOTHER, a SWEETHEART but the impact of us forgetting it and turning her into a worker, placing half of the household's burden on her fragile shoulders, has impacted children's upbringing and generally the *axloq* (virtue, morality) of society.[166]

For him, a tired woman was ultimately incapable of looking after or rearing her children. This kind of woman during the Perestroika years forgot her *o'zligini* (essence, identity) and started "imitating men and competing" with them in that they "wore pants, smoked cigarettes" and "as men, they left their house and spent time in gatherings, drank alcohol, told *askiya*[167] and laughed loudly."[168] In his opinion, this type of behavior among women during the Perestroika years posed a threat to motherhood. In his interpretation, these alleged changes in the appearance and behavior of women were central, as they were the main reasons for the assumed increase in divorce rates.[169] The issue of divorce cases appeared in *Saodat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* too. However, unlike Mirzarahimov, the articles there addressed other factors, such as a lack of knowledge about family life and the broader economic situation. Mirzarahimov believed that in order to save their families, "women should endure hardships." The urge for endurance, as demonstrated by the examples of *sabr* and *shukur*, appeared often in the articles of the period. Mirzarahimov used prominent female characters from Uzbek classic literature, such as Kumush and Ra'no from Abdulla Qodiri, one of the most influential Uzbek writers of the twentieth century, as examples. According to him, people remembered Kumush and Ra´no for their high *odob-axloq* (morality) rather than for their beauty, since they set the example for women to follow. He added that a real eastern woman should have

[166] Mirzarahimov, 4.

[167] *Askiya* is a genre of oral folk art, a debate, or an exchange of wit in a joking manner between two or more men over a certain subject.

[168] Mirzarahimov, "Qizim Senga Aytaman," 4.

[169] Mirzarahimov, 4.

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qirq-kokil, finely braided long hair, and not cut her hair short. He concluded his message by restating that motherhood was the highest goal of womanhood. This kind of analysis of women's lives was small in number, but the intellectual engagement was high in this kind of moralizing text compared to standard Soviet lifestyle texts. Mirzarahimov replaced the Soviet image of a working mother with the image of a woman who was enduring and obedient. The irony with these examples is that neither Kumush nor Ra´no symbolize the "traditional" woman that Mirzarahimov tried to construct. On the contrary, they represented the courageous women who pushed the boundaries of conservative, patriarchal Uzbek society in the early twentieth century. Kumush in the novel *Days Gone By* was portrayed as a woman who overcame obstacles to unite with her beloved partner Otabek but was poisoned by coincidence, whereas Ra´no in the novel *The Scorpion from the Altar* was a smart, free, and courageous woman who ran away with her beloved Anvar contrary to the societal norms of the time. She was "well educated and well versed in the high culture and humanistic ideas of the East."[170] Mirzarahimov's conservative interpretations of the images of these women show how some authors, mostly men but also women, were connecting the hardships during the socio-economic collapse to women's behavior. In addition, with a shortage of jobs, women were being seen as people who should leave their employment and spend their time rearing children and the nation. Lastly, these depictions demonstrate the anxiety around societal changes, despite the fact that people were committed to supporting the economic reforms.

The overwhelming majority of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* articles in 1990 and 1991 were also about motherhood and child rearing. Each issue had several articles about how to raise children, the situation in the kindergartens, the importance of *tarbiyaloo* (upbringing) in the formation of

[170] Shalolakhon Khusanboyevna Jurayeva, "History of the Novel and Its Importance as a Genre," *Eurasian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5 (February 2022): 178.

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Figure 14 A mother, Lenin Yo'li, March 8, 1990

character and morality of the young generation, etc. The number of articles discussing work compared to the early Perestroika years decreased. They took on a more critical tone when investigating the working conditions, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Motherhood being the main focus of the articles in *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, there were no accounts of women joining the emerging pro-independent political movements. The same is true for *Saodat,* except for the interviews it published with prominent pro-independent male activists, such as the above-mentioned Muhammad Solih.

Some academics interpreted these representations of women's roles as women losing the gains made during the Soviet era and the re-traditionalization of Central Asian societies. For instance, in 2005, Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes in her book *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*, argued that "imposing Soviet modernity" pushed the pre-Soviet practices and values of Central Asians to the private sphere and that these were practiced primarily by women "away from the eyes of the party." She thus used a top-down approach. She concluded, "By defending historical and cultural mores, women took part in reinforcing traditional gender relations in the private sphere, which proved immutable in a changing public sphere."[171] This

[171] Corcoran-Nantes, *Lost Voices*, 156.

binary approach misses the dynamics between the private and public spheres, which influence and reshape each other. Equally, Shirin Akiner in *Between Tradition and Modernity: The Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women* claimed that "the trauma of the *hujum* was suppressed [in the face of Stalinist purges in the 1930s], buried in the subconscious, as were so many of the other tragedies of this period."[172] This logic assumes that the trauma of *hujum* and the abolishing of *paranja* would subsequently be uncovered and "used in nation-building in the call for reexamining the Soviet legacy,"[173] which to my knowledge did not happen either during Perestroika or after Independence. While Central Asian countries experienced various waves of Islamic revival, the issue of the full veil (women covering their faces and hands as in the case of paranja) has been viewed as an individual choice or argued for by very specific conservative groups that are not the dominant form of Islam in the region. Marianne Kamp studied the *hujum* movement in 2005, utilizing the Uzbek language newspapers of the period, and conducting interviews with activist women. Her book remains one of the most prominent scholarly publications in English on the experiences of the 1920s Uzbek women's emancipation campaign, which uncovered the active participation of pro-reformist Uzbek women in the jujum. The tension between Muslim traditions and Soviet modernity and women´s adaptation strategies had also been studied by Madina Tlostanova, who uses decolonial theories. She coined the concept of "colonial gender-trickster subjectivity" to refer to Muslim Soviet Central Asian women who, according to her, resist interpretation through Western or third-wave feminism theories.[174] Drawing on Albán Achinte's re-existencia theory (a positive world- and self-creation) she argues that Central Asian

[172] Shirin Akiner, "Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia, Edited by Mary Buckley," in *Between Tradition and Modernity: The Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 251.

[173] Akiner, 263.

[174] Madina Tlostanova, *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

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women's experiences resist being identified as "traditional" or "Soviet" and choose to create their own self-understanding.[175] Similarly, Central Asian women's reactions to Soviet ideology and Perestroika period nationalism were far from binary or passive acceptance, as articulated in the press. My further discussion demonstrates that they were more complex and multilayered, reflecting magazines' efforts to negotiate women's sometimes conflicting interests and multiple identities.

The topic of "morality" among young women was touched upon in the letters to the editors of both journals in the 1990s. These articles frequently focused on women's "moral behavior," which some readers connected to their ability to maintain stable marriages. They used "morality" and "moral behavior" to refer to women's behavior according to the expectations of Central Asian society. As divorce cases were rising, some of the readers assumed this was the consequence of loosened control. Referring to the increase in divorce cases in Kyrgyzstan from 7810 in 1988 to 8207 in 1989, a female party member wrote in an article in *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* about the alleged impact the rising divorces had on children. While recognizing the difficulty a woman could be going through, she reminded women of their moral obligations as primarily mothers.[176] Equally, the head of the Surkhandarya women's committee in Uzbekistan, Rano Shodieva, said the downside of women's modern lives was that excessive freedom could lead women to moral and cultural (*ma´naviy*) poverty. Some commenters understood *ma'naviy* poverty in cultural terms such as forgetting ethnic language and traditions, but also in religious terms, as becoming materialistic and not being interested in spiritual gain or caregiving for children or the elderly. According to Shodieva, this resulted from women vying with men for equality and being overburdened with work and household duties. As a result, women were not emancipated but, on the contrary,

[175] Tlostanova, 9.
[176] "Kün Tartibinde Üy-Bülö," 8.

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enslaved for material gains.[177] The solution Shodieva proposed was to educate women in special schools of motherhood where they could learn about the way of life and work of Muslim women in the Middle East, among other things, to meet the present needs.[178] This shows how anxiety about women's morality existed not only among some male conservative reporters like Mirzarahimov but also among women working in state institutions. Both the party members in *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* and Rano Shodieva in *Saodat*, were portraying modernity as a threat to women´s family lives. A reader named Kalyipa from Yssyk-Kol province wrote to the editors of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* to express her concerns about women smoking and drinking alcohol "openly." Her concerns seem to be primarily directed at women's behavior in public spaces, as the word "openly" implies she did not mind if she did it in private space. She connected this "immoral" behavior to the "new fashion" in the clothing of women. She expressed her disappointment about the new *moda* (fashion) of women who were wearing heavy make-up, putting on pants, and drinking.[179] Equally, another reader encouraged young women to wear national dresses. In 1990, Zuura Mambetova wrote to the editors of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, asking, "Why don't young people wear our national dresses?" She was puzzled:

> Why are young people ashamed of wearing national dresses, whereas other nationalities like 'Uzbek-relatives' do not put away their *doppi* [skull caps] and put on *atlas* [silk textile with striped prints] dresses despite the summer heat? They feel uncomfortable without them. For us, it is the contrary; we elderly hardly ever see young people wearing national dresses.[180]

For Mambetova, there is a link between "national clothing" and "national culture," whereas for Kalyipa, "new fashion" is a signifier of modernity. Katherine Dooley, when studying the Brezhnev era material culture in Central Asia, stated that Central Asian women had in fact

[177] Usmanova, "Yo'llar Yo'llarga Tutash: Surxondaryo Viloyati Xotin-Qizlar Qo'mitasi Raisi Bo'ritosh Shodiyeva Bilan Suhbat," 12.

[178] Usmanova, 12.

[179] Usmanova, 12.

[180] *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, 1990. No. 2, 26.

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developed a particular Soviet Central Asian style of clothing that was a fusion of national and European styles of clothing.[181] They had modernized versions of national-style dresses from *atlas* for example, as well as European-style skirts and pants, in their wardrobes. The fact that Mambetova and Kalyipa favored national clothes over modern fashion could be a reaction to widespread attitudes among urban or urbanized women to call "traditional" (used interchangeably with national) clothes backward. Dooley interviewed urbanized women both in Tashkent and in Bishkek, some of whom stated they would not wear traditional clothes to work as they would look backward.[182] At the same time, "increasingly over time, elements of culture that might have been judged 'backward,' religious in origin, or connected to the pre-revolutionary elite were instead reframed as legitimately national."[183] Examples of Mambetova and Kalyipa, however, demonstrate that contestation between national/traditional and modern continued into the Perestroika years in Central Asia.

In contrast to voices calling to favor national over modern, some other women were advocating for integrating national values into Soviet style lives. A letter to the editor of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary* from 1990 stated a new Kyrgyz woman, in addition to being Soviet, had to treat the elderly respectfully, maintain close family relationships with parents, particularly treat her in-laws with respect, and pass on the "traditional" *adep* (etiquette, morality) to her children and follow them herself. Sovietness, as portrayed in the magazine, was understood as being an educated, modernized, 'cultured' working mother. The same image they proposed had to include close relationships with the in-laws' extended family and be informed by ethnic practices. As the

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[181] Dooley, "Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference: Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945-1985," 406.
[182] Dooley, 405.
[183] Dooley, 407.

Kyrgyz poet, Nurpais Jarkynbay, wrote in his article *Kyzdary Sonun Kyrgyzdyn* (Kyrgyz girls are beautiful) in 1990, historically there had been mutual learning between different generations of women, with *baybiche* (grandmother) teaching *kyzdar* (girls) with forty plaits about the upcoming family life, and *kelin kyzdar* (young brides) sharing their experiences with them. He reminded younger women of these close connections between generations, as he believed this mutual support had declined in the Kyrgyz community.[184]

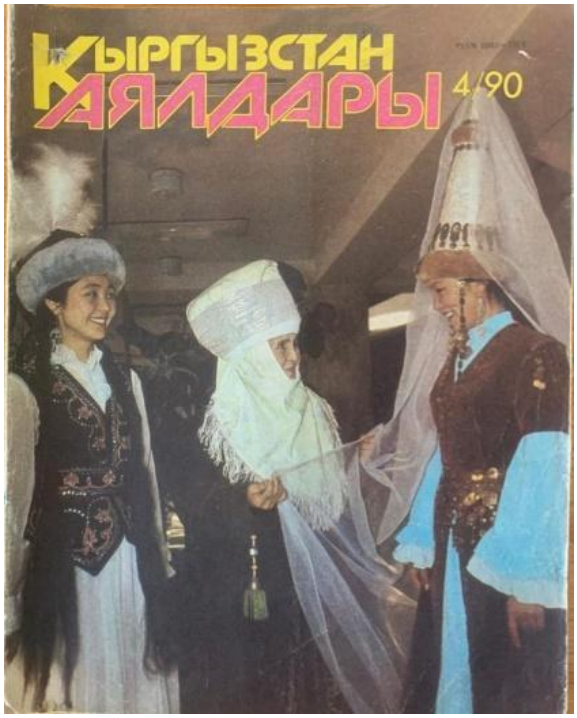

Figure 15 Kyrgyz women in national dresses, March 1990

A last group of articles about the topic of nationality and modernity was critical, but not of the modern values as such missing word(s) but of the failure to reach the ideal of Soviet modernity. Kolinovsky named this kind of criticism "Soviet-style criticism," which meant things were bad because the ideal of Soviet modernity had not been reached.[185] For example, Gulchehra Jamilova,

[184] Nurpais Jarkynbay, "Kyzdary Sonun Kyrgyzdyn," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, 1990, 7.
[185] Kalinovsky, "Prizyvniki Socializma: Tadjikskaya Intelligentsia I Dekolonizatsiya Po-Sovetski," 140.

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in her November 1991 letter to the editors of *Saodat,* reflected on why one needed modernity in villages. She thought the difficult conditions in the villages, with the shortage of gas, water supply, and electricity cuts, as well as the low wages for work, made the lives of people in villages hard. She described the failed attempts of the Uzbek administration to secure comfortable living conditions for the villagers, which led to the growing desire among young people to leave for cities with plenty of options for entertainment in theaters, cinemas, restaurants, and concerts. Her dream was to have a comfortable house equipped with furniture and the opportunity to send her children to libraries.[186] Jamilova is one of many other readers, as *Saodat* had a column named *Learning is Good for Yourself,* where editors answered questions from readers about designing the living space and shared practical tips like decorating and furnishing children's rooms and others.[187] Both magazines regularly interviewed singers, ballet dancers, artists, and actresses to keep interest in arts and culture among the readers. This indeed demonstrates how the magazines were trying to balance the promotion of different values, national, Soviet, and modern. Promoting national values, some of which went against Soviet modernity, did not seem contradictory to them, or they assumed women would choose for themselves.

Revival of Interest in Cultural heritage - Reshaping the Standardized Soviet Culture

In line with Yuval-Devis´s concept of women as reproducers of nations, Carol S. Lilly and Jill A. Irvine wrote that it is women rather than men who are seen as

> Responsible for transmitting the history, traditions, culture, and values of the nation. [W]omen's identity and meaning are relegated to the domestic sphere, where they are to function

[186] Gulchehra Jamilova, "Qishloqqa Zamonaviylik Kerakmi?," *Saodat*, November 1991, 19.
[187] "Bolalar Xonasi: U Qanday Jihozlanadi?," *Saodat*, November 1991, 28.

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> primarily as reproducers and socializers of future citizens, while men are portrayed as political actors and defenders of the nation.[188]

Indeed, in the late Perestroika debates on women's roles in the press, cultural heritage was another concept the writers frequently used. Keeping cultural heritage for them meant favoring traditional customs, arts, languages, and historical legacies over the standardized Soviet identity. It did not mean they refuted "Sovietness" in its complete form, as education, medicine, and infrastructure were seen in relation to Soviet achievements and modernity. However, favoring national forms of cultural behavior such as certain modes of celebration, reviving forgotten or suppressed histories such as *Yrkyn* (also spelled *Urkun*, a 1916 uprising against the imperial mobilization law), victims of the Stalinist purge such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Abdulhamid Chulpon, Fitrat, and others, and acquiring official language status for native languages alongside Russian and thus lifting their statuses among the general public were common in all of the I examined.

The suggestions of the well-known Kyrgyz poet and member of the Union of Soviet Writers, Ninakan Jundubaeva, on how to shape Nooruz celebration as a national Kyrgyz holiday were published in the March 1990 issue of *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*. She believed that *democratizatsiya* triggered a period of increased ethnic self-awareness and interest in learning about the Kyrgyz people's own history, culture, literature, and customs. Therefore, in this context, she said that it was "the responsibility of the women and the children they raised to shape and define their people's customs."[189] She continued by saying that traditionally, women had organized the Nooruz celebration. Jundubaeva´s suggestions demonstrate attempts to promote women as active shapers and leaders of cultural activities in the country. It should be noted that while promoting cultural values, Jundubaeva was careful to situate her promotions within the broader

[188] Carol S. Lilly and Jill A. Irvine, "Negotiating Interests: Women and Nationalism in Serbia and Croatia, 1990-1997," *East European Politics and Societies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 112.

[189] Ninakan Jundubaeva, "Nooruz Mayramyna Ak Jol," *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, March 1990, 3.

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context and not against it, as she referred to Soviet policies. Jundubaeva said the revised nationality policy stated that "the ideology of socialism requires 'the friendship of peoples', and each nation has a right to save its own specificity, culture, and language, as well as rights to real equal opportunities."[190] The task was to put the theory into practice, and she proposed combining Nooruz celebration with *tushoo toi* (celebration when the newborn begins to walk), *jentek toi*, or *beshik toi* (birth feast) to revive interest in Nooruz among the population. She even compared the celebration of Nooruz with the New Year's celebration with a decorated Christmas tree. While New Year celebration had become part of Kyrgyz society, Kyrgyz people should not forget their own culture. She constantly refers to "ancient times" to prove these celebrations were an important part of the cultural life of the Kyrgyz people. But the most important historical example she gave was the way a Kyrgyz wedding would be organized. She stated that after the parents of the bride agreed to the marriage and organized a feast at their place, they would bring the bride to the groom's place with a national hat, *sho'ky'lo'* (russified *saukele*) on her head, and the feast would continue. This was an account demonstrating the mutual agreement reached between two families, contrary to the depictions of *ala kachuu* (bride kidnapping), the abduction of women to a forced marriage, being widely practiced. Jundubaeva exemplified the way of thinking to integrate positive elements of forgotten or less practiced customs into Soviet modernity. This type of thinking was enabled within the context of reviving stated in the articles about self-determination with discourse that each nation had the right to shape its own culture in its own way. But this time within the renewed Soviet context and the potential of national sovereignty.

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[190] Ninakan Jundubaeva, 3.

Renewed Interest in Central Asian Histories

Both journals had remarkable interest in the region's pre-Soviet history that was not reflected in the official historiography of the time, which, under the standardized curriculum, aimed at promoting Soviet ideology. Standardized histories taught history in terms of class struggle, each nationality in its own distinct way, towards the progress of communism and focused on the achievements of the workers and the socialist state. Historical figures were taught in relation to their contribution to building a Soviet state, with pre-Soviet histories receiving limited attention. The general rhetoric was that the pre-Soviet times were barbaric and backward. In contrast, articles discussing history had two main topics, one reviving the memory of the *Yrkyn* uprisal in Kyrgyzstan and the victims of the Stalinist purges, as well as a lack of knowledge about the ancient times of each nationality. Solutions to the issue given in Saodat for Uzbekistan were seen in publishing and using forgotten histories, initially in the Uzbek literary periodicals, such as *Uzbekiston Adabiyoti va Sanáti* (Uzbek Literature and Art), *Sharq Yulduzi* (Star of the East), *Yoshlik* (Youth), *Fan va Turmush* (Science and Life), *Saodat* (Contentment), *Sanát* (Art), *and Yosh Kuch* (Young Power), but also in producing new history textbooks.[191] The articles in *Saodat*, which contained the suggestions of different members of the Writers Union of Uzbekistan on reviving native histories, were published as a sequence of three related articles in Saodat and contained very detailed suggestions on which history to write and whose memory to revive. The article also suggested writing different history textbooks for different ages, starting from simplified picture stories for children to historical books for the older generation growing up during the Soviet era who do not know much of the region's history. Raising interest in learning national history was

[191] "Milliy Tarix," *Saodat,* August 1991, 11.

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seen as a key to creating a united national identity. The same article said, “People who remember their past understand the true value of independence and long for it.”[192]

It should be noted that, despite the refocus on the historical narrative, the rhetoric on reviving national histories adopted the Soviet style of history writing, as the emphasis on reviving the memory of figures was made with the goal of fostering patriotic feelings in the population. In the same way that the Soviet state taught communist history in order to instill patriotic feelings, Uzbek revisionists hoped to instill patriotic feelings toward those who “died for the sake of the Uzbek nation.” However, they saw themselves as influenced by the practice in the nineteenth century Turkic khanates, when khans had two historians and the city heads (*hokims*) to support them with informed knowledge of the space and its people. In either case, this shows the initial examples of public discussion on cultivating national belonging in emerging nation states.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the political context of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan during the late Perestroika years. Using Nira Yuval-Devis' concept, I examined Uzbek and Kyrgyz women's representations as “mothers” and “reproducers of nations.” Both women's periodicals and the general press portrayed women as mothers, connecting their behavior and fashion to represent the “morality” of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek nations. National dresses had to be worn more often for women to look national. However, I argue that Central Asian women portrayed in the press were not always or only victims of patriarchal oppression or instruments of state socialism. Rather, they negotiated their interests as women and as members of nations emerging from the Soviet experiment as a political project. In the following section, I looked at articles that depicted women

[192] “Milliy Tarix,” 11.

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as keepers and creators of cultural norms and national holidays. Articles instructed women to take leadership in passing on and shaping national celebrations and popularizing previously seen "backward" "traditions" by integrating them into Soviet holidays.

Representations of women as keepers of national culture and embracing motherhood in the press were a way of recognizing women's contributions to maintaining social stability and the thriving of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek nations. While national identities as state categories were formed during the Soviet era, Glasnost provided greater freedom to the press, which contributed to diversifying standardized depictions of history and culture by publishing articles about national history, celebrations, and language.

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Conclusion

Emerging research on Central Asian women's experiences during the late Soviet and post-independence years has portrayed the period as a "return to traditionalism" and "re-islamization," in which women associate womanhood primarily with motherhood. They jump to the conclusion that women lost the status they gained during socialism and thus lost their voices.

My analysis of the articles in *Saoadat* and *Kyrgyzstan Ayaldary*, as well as other relevant press and correspondence of the editors of the magazines with their readers as published in the journals, suggests that women's concerns were depicted around two major issues, labor and nations, the meanings of which changed during the Perestroika years.

As I discuss in Chapter II, from 1985 to 1989, magazines portrayed Uzbek and Kyrgyz women as builders of communism, contributing their equal share to the construction of a communist society through the example of successful women. In these depictions, labor was meant to serve the socialist state while also acknowledging its achievements and teaching the younger generations to do the same. They used the Bolshevik vocabulary of overcoming “the dark past” and “feudal culture” and becoming “cultured” and “emancipated.”

In contrast to more balanced depictions of Central Asian women engaged in various activities, including science, during earlier periods of the Soviet Union, women were primarily depicted as agricultural workers during the Perestroika years. Women's aspirations were aligned with the state's priority for Central Asia as an agricultural region. The difficulties at work during these years were portrayed as solvable, either by the state or by the dedication and courage of Central Asian women. Despite the fact that women’s magazines in Russia have utilized criticism of state promises and gaps to raise the concerns of their readers, this was not a common

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phenomenon in Central Asian women's magazines. They were emphasizing the will and dedication of women in order to reach their objectives. Despite the difficulties, achieving goals and being promoted by the party as a result provided women with community recognition. This was portrayed as another reason for women to participate in communist building.

In 1990, with the Demokratizatsia and Glasnost policies shifting state censorship, depictions of Kyrgyz and Uzbek women started to change. Journalists using investigative journalism techniques depicted exploitative conditions in the agricultural sector, namely cocoon, tobacco, and cotton growing in both countries and the textile industry in Kyrgyzstan. Magazines portrayed the various reactions of women to political and economic changes. Some women took advantage of emerging political and economic opportunities, while others were content with what they had, and some committed suicide in the face of exploitative conditions and high societal expectations, as well as domestic abuse. When reporting on different women's reactions, journalists attempted to take into account but also reflect on Central Asian cultural norms towards women, such as finding content and enduring hardships. They did not ask directly the farmer women but wrote their interpretations of women's choices and concerns about their difficult circumstances in their articles. Some explained women's content as a lack of free time for women to stop and reflect on their circumstances, while others assumed they were accustomed to this way of life, especially in rural areas, and were not aware of other possibilities. On the other hand, the Moscow press portrayed self-immolation cases as evidence of feudal culture persisting in Central Asia which demonstrates how Moscow-based journalists continued to portray Central Asians as "backward" during the Perestroika years even after the state agenda of "emancipating" and "culturalizing" was lifted. Others, such as Adil Yakubov, the head of the Uzbek Writers Union,

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saw the reasons in exploitative working conditions in the fields and societal expectations from women.

As I continued to discuss another major issue concerning women in Chapter 3 on national issues, I could see how the press began to replace the image of serving the state with national and family oriented values. Women were now depicted as mothers, reproducing and raising the nations, and articles urged women to pass on and shape the national customs. Many women appeared to regard motherhood as their primary obligation, associated labor with hardship, and celebrated cultural revival by calling for the revival of national celebrations and their integration into their Soviet realities.

My analysis also shows that women's reconsideration of their roles in society by integrating pre-Soviet values did not necessarily mean they rejected Sovietness and called for "going back to history," but rather invoked "reviving national heritage," which they saw as an important part of their self-understanding.

Based on my analysis, I argue that "reviving national heritage," rather than advocating going back to the pre-Soviet patriarchal order, meant raising the status of national languages, forgotten or unpopular celebrations, pre-Soviet history, victims of the Stalinist purges and others. In discussing these in the press, women saw themselves as active participants in building a new nation-centric society. They were concerned about raising a new generation of the nation and saw maintaining cultural heritage as nurturing the nation.

They equally tried to bring more attention to the issues of difficult working conditions, particularly health problems occurring in the cotton and tobacco fields as a result of corruption, insufficient management, and unrealistic plans by the party and kolkhoz leaders.

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Magazines used the glasnost policy to voice individual concerns that were shared by other members of society in transition. Namely, some women saw quitting work and prioritizing motherhood as a solution in the midst of unemployment, while others engaged in emerging market-oriented enterprises. Different voices appearing in the press indicate a broader phenomenon where traditional practices and modern influences intertwine and economic growth was seen as a central concern for the people.

Labor was depicted at the center of women's self-understanding, first as contributors to building communism and later as a means to adapt to and handle changing realities. Their work experiences depicted in the press were shaped by factors such as economy and location, whether rural or urban. This approach acknowledges that women's experiences were not uniform and varied across different social groups; rural women's experiences and agencies were determined by the conditions in the kolkhozes and by cultural, and economic pressures in exploitative environments with high societal expectations.

As economic hardships increased and censorship was lifted, some voices in magazines supported nationalist ideologies of reviving religion and embracing motherhood. However, in doing so, they negated the stereotypes of women being passive, acted flexiblely to adapt to new realities, and reinvented new roles in a changing society with nation centric approaches. It is also important to note that this renewed emphasis on motherhood and family centric values occurred within the broader Soviet context, with Moscow enacting a number of policies "to protect motherhood and family," as other studies of the Russian press suggest this was true for Russian society at the time.

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In terms of the national question, magazines portrayed Demokratizatsiya policies as state-encouraged activities that sparked interest in ethnic self-consciousness and learning about Kyrgyz and Uzbek people's own history, culture, literature, and customs compared to a standardized and class based Soviet history. From 1990 on, the magazines that urged women during the early years of Perestroika to recognize socialist achievement and carry on its legacy were now urging their readers to become more nation-centric and take the lead in shaping and revitalizing national values, seeing them as equal to Soviet or modern lifestyles.

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