

**Contesting Gender Roles:
Shifts in the Lives of Women in Kazakhstan and Their Representation in Soviet Periodicals
during Perestroika, 1985-1991**

By
Reika Kobayashi

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Historical Studies
and
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
Graduate School of Global Studies

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Yukiko Tatsumi
Second Reader: Professor Marsha Siefert

Vienna, Austria – Tokyo, Japan

2025

Copyright Notice

Contesting Gender Roles: Shifts in the Lives of Women in Kazakhstan and Their Representation in Soviet Periodicals during Perestroika, 1985-1991 © 2025 by Reika Kobayashi is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



For bibliographic and reference purposes this thesis should be referred to as:

Kobayashi, Reika. “Contesting Gender Roles: Shifts in the Lives of Women in Kazakhstan and Their Representation in Soviet Periodicals during Perestroika, 1985-1991.” MA thesis, Central European University and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2025.

¹ Icon by Creative Commons, <https://creativecommons.org/mission/downloads/>.

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Reika Kobayashi**, candidate for the MA degree in History declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Contesting Gender Roles: Shifts in the Lives of Women in Kazakhstan and Their Representation in Soviet Periodicals during Perestroika, 1985-1991” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree, except as part of the co-tutelle agreement between Central European University Private University and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Public University.

Vienna, 01 June 2025

Reika Kobayashi

Abstract

Women's roles and social status in Kazakhstan have undergone significant historical transformations, shaped initially by nomadic customs and gender norms. When the Bolsheviks came to power, Kazakh women became targets of “modernisation” policies and were exposed to Soviet-style education. As a result, Kazakh women seemingly enjoyed equal rights with men throughout the Soviet period. Amidst this backdrop, the economic, political, and sociocultural reforms introduced during Gorbachev's perestroika (1985–1991) significantly affected women in Kazakhstan. This thesis examines how these reforms affected women's roles and status, and how these shifts were represented in Soviet periodicals, by analysing articles from those publications.

This thesis identifies several key findings. The introduction of the market economy tended to exclude women from productive labour, although some began participating in newly emerging cooperatives. The liberalisation of speech under glasnost (openness) enabled discourse in the public sphere on patriarchal gender norms rooted in the pre-Soviet era. At the same time, alternative beauty standards emphasising consumerism and physical appearance began to emerge. This period witnessed rising ethnic consciousness and the spread of Islam, with some women and magazines actively engaged in this process. However, these changes did not occur overnight; rather, perestroika was marked by the coexistence of typical Soviet gender roles and their emerging counterparts. Additionally, even in the late 1980s, Kazakh women faced economic and social disparities compared to Slavic women, particularly Russians. They often worked in low-paid, low-skilled, and inadequate environments, revealing a stark status contrast. These findings contribute to a more complex understanding of how Kazakh women—marginalised by ethnicity, region, and gender—engaged with and were affected by the transformations of the perestroika period, thereby offering a multilayered perspective to existing studies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Yukiko Tatsumi and Professor Marsha Siefert, for their invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and continued support throughout this research. Their expertise, encouragement, and kind support – both intellectual and emotional – have profoundly shaped my thinking and contributed significantly to my academic growth.

I am also sincerely grateful to Professor Rin Odawara for her thoughtful advice and for consistently offering stimulating perspectives. Her guidance was particularly meaningful during moments of uncertainty in my research, and her support has been significant to me throughout my studies.

Lastly, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my peers in the History in the Public Sphere program. Their inspiring conversations, generous support, and warm friendship have made this academic journey both enriching and memorable.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 “Emancipation” from Above: Historiography on Women in Kazakhstan.....	9
Traditional Gender Roles in Kazakhstan	9
Soviet Perspective on Central Asian Women.....	13
Women’s “Emancipation” in Kazakhstan	17
Ethnic Differences of Women in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev Era	25
Chapter 2 Rethinking Perestroika: From the Perspective of Ethnicity and Gender.....	29
Overview on Perestroika.....	29
The Reception of Perestroika in Kazakhstan	33
Perestroika from Women’s Perspective	38
Chapter 3 Analysis of Soviet Periodicals on Kazakhstan during Perestroika.....	46
The Roles of Women’s Magazines.....	46
Methodology	50
Reemerging Conservatism and Religion.....	52
The Rise and Regulation of Ethnic Consciousness.....	57
The Roles of Women in Labour	63
Emergence of New Beauty Standards.....	72
Conclusion	77
Bibliography	80

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. <i>Soviet Woman</i> , “‘Soviet Perestroika’ in the USA,” January 31, 1990.	61
Figure 2. <i>Krestyanka</i> , “Sproshu ne tol’ko o zdorov’e,” May 1986.	64
Figure 3. <i>Soviet Woman</i> , “Rombom and Others,” January 31, 1990.	66
Figure 4. <i>Komsomolskaya Pravda</i> , “Bravo, Saltanat!,” November 23, 1988.	73
Figure 5. <i>Izvestia</i> , “‘Miss Aziya’ iz Alma-Aty,” November 23, 1988.	73

Introduction

In Kazakhstan, women's roles and social status have experienced significant shifts through a series of political turning points. Prior to the Soviet era, Kazakh society was structured around gender norms rooted in the nomadic customary laws. Compared to women in southern Central Asia and the Middle East, where normative Islamic culture had deeply embedded in daily life, Kazakh women enjoyed relatively greater freedoms; nonetheless, their rights remained considerably restricted in comparison to Kazakh men.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in Kazakhstan, they sought to “emancipate” Kazakh women by implementing various legal reforms and social initiatives. In this process, women's magazines played a significant role in promoting “enlightenment” among local women. As a result, although tensions emerged between traditional nomadic values and the pressures of modernisation, many women entered the productive labour force and gained legal equality with men. However, a clear labour disparity persisted between Kazakh women and Slavic women, particularly Russians: even in the later Soviet period, the former tended to engage in low-paid and low-skilled work, and their working conditions remained inadequate.

In this historical context, perestroika launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 introduced reforms such as the introduction of market economy, elections, and freedom of speech. These reforms had a notable influence on the roles and status of women. The relaxation of social control allowed Soviet citizens to engage in discussions within the public sphere on conservative gender norms that had previously been suppressed. In Kazakhstan, the liberalisation of speech especially contributed to a rise in Kazakh ethnic consciousness and the spread of Islamic influence. These social and cultural shifts were also reflected in the discourse and visual materials of Soviet periodicals at the time.

Despite the numerous gender history studies conducted on the Soviet Union, most of them have concentrated on Slavic regions, particularly in urban areas of Russia. Valentine M. Moghadam has carried out perceptive research on how the transformation of the economy, ideology, and political systems in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union affected women's employment, roles, and social status. Her focus is primarily on women in Eastern European socialist states and Slavic areas of the Soviet Union, and she does not address women in the Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan. Therefore, research on women in Kazakhstan during the transitional period is crucial for reflecting ethnic diversity in the history of the communist bloc.

Moreover, in gender-focused research on the Soviet Union and Central Asia, the perestroika period has received relatively little attention compared to both the earlier Soviet era and the post-Soviet period. Many gender history studies frame their analyses within the dichotomy of the Soviet and post-independence periods, often overlooking the fact that during perestroika, Soviet values coexisted with emerging values that would become more prominent after independence. Katerina Sirinyok-Dolgryova conducted an insightful study analysing women's magazines published between 1971 and 2010, focusing on changes in the topics and visual materials featured in these magazines. Yet, her analysis primarily focuses on representations in typical Soviet-era women's magazines and those in post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine, with only limited reference to the perestroika period that lay between the two eras.

In addition, very few existing studies on Kazakhstan during the perestroika period incorporate a gender perspective. Timur Dadabaev has conducted noteworthy research on how people in Central Asia remember and evaluate perestroika. However, in the interviews he conducted in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, there were approximately ten fewer

female informants than male ones in each country, and he does not comment on this disparity. Moreover, his analysis does not consider differences in how women and men evaluated perestroika, with little focus on gender perspectives.

Similarly, although some prior studies have examined the perestroika period in Kazakhstan from the perspectives of rising ethnic consciousness and the resurgence of Islam, these works have not sufficiently addressed how these elements were related to gender politics. Irina Morozova has conducted thought-provoking research on the narratives of ordinary people regarding perestroika in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. She points out that it was during perestroika or the post-independence period that many people first became aware of their ethnic identities. However, she does not explore how this awareness affected women. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the experiences of women in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period, a topic that has been marginalised in terms of gender, ethnicity, and time frame.

This thesis aims to investigate the shifts of women's roles in Kazakhstan as shaped by the reforms associated with perestroika, through an analysis of articles published in Soviet periodicals. It investigates how the economic, political, and sociocultural reforms introduced during perestroika and glasnost (openness) sparked discourse on traditional, conservative, and patriarchal gender norms within the public sphere in Kazakhstan. It also explores how women and women's magazines were involved in the process of transformation, particularly in relation to the rise of ethnic consciousness and the increasing visibility of Islam within Kazakh society. In addition, the study examines the impact of these reforms on women's lives, focusing on shifts in working patterns and beauty standards. Lastly, it analyses how these social shifts were represented in Soviet state-sponsored periodicals.

The methodology of this study is based on the analysis of articles published in Soviet periodicals during the perestroika era (1985-1991). In terms of research strategy, it covered both the textual content of the articles and, where applicable, the visual materials included in them. The primary sources include three women's magazines—*Krestyanka* (Female Peasant), *Rabotnitsa* (Female Worker), and *Soviet Woman*—as well as articles featured in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, and materials archived in the *Soviet Red Archives* collection held by the Open Society Archivum (OSA). For the latter two sources, this analysis specifically utilised articles published in *Izvestia*, *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Pravda*, and *TASS*. From these sources, articles related to Kazakh women and women in Kazakhstan, as well as those indicating the impact of perestroika on Kazakh society at the time, were selected. The analysis in this study is organised around four thematic categories: “conservatism and religion,” “ethnic consciousness,” “labour,” and “beauty standards.”

This study holds two significant contributions. First, it sheds light on gender politics in Kazakhstan, a topic that has received relatively little academic attention despite the country's transition from a Soviet periphery to an independent nation. While the Soviet Union's gender equality policies and the roles of women in society have long attracted considerable scholarly interest, particularly in Western academia, much of the existing literature focuses on Slavic regions of the Soviet Union, especially urban Russia. Some studies have addressed women's status and roles in Soviet Central Asia; however, they have predominantly concentrated on Uzbekistan, the most populous republic in the region. Although Kazakhs and Uzbeks both belong to the Turkic ethnic group, the Uzbeks have traditionally been more sedentary and have adopted Islam more widely, setting them apart from the predominantly nomadic Kazakh

population. Therefore, by focusing on women in Kazakhstan, this study contributes to a more layered understanding of Soviet and Central Asian history.

Second, this research investigates the shifting roles and representations of women in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period, which remains an underexplored chapter in gender historiography. Previous research on the status of women in Kazakhstan has primarily focused on two distinctive periods: the Soviet era prior to perestroika and the post-independence period. Since perestroika represents a transitional phase between these two periods, and one that did not yet exhibit the stark contrasts that emerged after independence, it has remained relatively underexplored. In addition, as Tolganay Umbetaliyeva indicates, the perestroika period has not been given much attention by Kazakhstani researchers, for which there have been some systemic political reasons. Dadabaev and Morozova point out that evaluations of perestroika differ depending on political and social positions, especially between elites and the ordinary people in Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan. Even more than 30 years later, a dominant narrative has yet to be established, which may help explain the relative lack of scholarly attention. Nonetheless, perestroika was a time of significant economic, political, and sociocultural reform. It is essential to understand how women in Kazakhstan were affected by these transformations and how they acted within these shifting conditions. This study offers valuable insights for both historical studies and contemporary gender analysis in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

Meanwhile, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, although it analyses articles from Soviet state-sponsored women's magazines, newspapers, and news agencies during the perestroika period, it does not engage in a comparative analysis with similar sources from earlier or later periods. While this research aims to clarify the relationship between

the reforms of perestroika and women in Kazakhstan, it is evident that the significance of this period becomes more pronounced when placed in comparison with adjacent eras. This analysis is grounded in existing historical research and shaped by the author's own interpretive perspective, each representing a limitation of the study.

Second, it should also be noted that, due to the limitations of author's language proficiency, only Russian and English-language sources were analysed in this study. Consequently, Kazakh-language periodicals, such as *Qazaqstan Aielderi* (Women of Kazakhstan), which is an important women's magazine, could not be included in the analysis. Additionally, all primary sources examined in this study are state-sponsored print media; private publications that emerged from the perestroika era are not covered in this research.

I would also like to briefly reflect on my own positionality. As a Japanese woman trained in history, area studies, and gender studies, I approach this research with an outsider's perspective on Kazakh history. My interest in the histories of Kazakh women was sparked by my experiences during an academic exchange program at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU). In 2020, I spent approximately four weeks in Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan, and returned for two semesters between 2021 and 2022. During this time, I became deeply interested in how local people discuss and remember the Soviet period. In post-independence Kazakhstan, ethnic identity, tradition, and religion have gained increasing importance. Even in Almaty, where the historical spread of Islam was relatively limited, I noticed a growing number of women wearing the veil in public spaces, which further sparked my curiosity.

I was also fortunate to have a few opportunities to engage with feminist activists based in Almaty. Moreover, while spending time with students at KazNU, I also had the opportunity to hear their perspectives on the status and history of women in Kazakhstan. Some of the activists

and students I spoke with expressed the view that, traditionally, Kazakh women had enjoyed freedom, but that Soviet policies had forced their sedentarisation and imposed new restrictions on women's rights. I was particularly struck by their critical perspective on the Soviet period, as well as by the way they connected gender roles in pre-Soviet nomadic society to contemporary feminist discourse.

During the Soviet era, Russians made up the majority of the population in Kazakhstan, and the Kazakh language, history, and culture were placed in a relatively subordinate position compared to their Russian and Soviet counterparts. In this context, the growing emphasis on ethnic identity and traditional gender roles in post-independence Kazakhstan stands in sharp contrast to the Soviet past. These experiences in Almaty led me to develop an interest in the pivotal moments of sociocultural transformation in Kazakhstan, particularly the reforms of the perestroika era, which ultimately became the focus of this study. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that my cultural background and academic positioning may shape the questions I ask, the sources I prioritise, and the interpretations I provide. Therefore, throughout this study, I aim to reflect on my positionality by critically engaging with both my own assumptions and existing scholarly narratives.

This thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter provides an overview of traditional gender norms and the roles of women in pre-modern Kazakhstan, and how these were transformed during the Soviet era and rooted until the period prior to perestroika. This chapter also discusses the differences in the lives and social positions of Kazakh women and Slavic women, particularly Russian women, in the pre-perestroika period. The second chapter focuses on an overview of the reforms that accompanied perestroika, as well as the reception of these reforms within Central Asian societies, including Kazakhstan. It also examines how these

reforms affected the economic, political, and sociocultural circumstances surrounding women across the Soviet Union. The final chapter is dedicated to the analysis of articles related to women in Kazakhstan published in Soviet periodicals during the perestroika era. The chapter begins with a historical overview of the role of women's magazines in the Soviet Union and in Kazakhstan and proceeds to analyse the selected articles based on the four thematic categories mentioned earlier.

Chapter 1

“Emancipation” from Above: Historiography on Women in Kazakhstan

This chapter provides an overview of traditional gender norms and distinctive customs within Kazakh nomadic culture and examines how the Bolsheviks perceived these practices, as well as the processes through which they sought to modernise them. It further explores the social status of women in Kazakhstan during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era preceding perestroika. The gender norms and social status of women in Kazakhstan underwent rapid transformation as a result of the country’s incorporation into the Soviet Union and subsequent modernisation. Prior to this, Kazakh society followed nomadic customs with strict gender norms. However, beginning in the 1920s, the Soviet leadership promoted the “emancipation” of women as a central ideological objective. Although the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era did not witness significant changes in women’s status, women were ideally expected to play significant roles in both the public and private domains under the socialist regime.

Traditional Gender Roles in Kazakhstan

Before the October Revolution in 1917, Kazakh people lived according to their own nomadic traditions and gender norms. Even after the whole of Kazakhstan came under the control of the Russian Empire by the mid-19th century, the nomadic lifestyle of Kazakhs had not required significant changes. In Kazakh society, the roles of women and men were defined in detail according to nomadic traditions: basically, women had fewer rights than men in many aspects of their lives.

Kazakh marriage was one of the most distinctive customs and it was later among those targeted for eradication by the Soviet leadership. Janat Kundakbayeva examines nomadic gender

norms in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan, as well as the Bolsheviks' modernisation policies targeting Kazakh women during the 1920s and 1930s. She indicates that in general, marriages in Kazakh society had an extremely low level of endogamy, which led to the complete absence of links between a bride and her relatives.² Cynthia Werner indicates that ethnographic accounts of pre-Soviet life suggest that most Kazakh marriages were arranged by family members when the bride and groom were still young children. Bride abduction was an unusual occurrence in the pre-Soviet period.³ Interestingly, this contradicts the fact that bride abduction has been broadly perceived as one of the symbols of nomadic customs of Kazakhstan.

Moreover, the custom of bride prices was also deeply rooted in traditional Kazakh marriages. The groom's family paid bride wealth in the form of cattle to the bride's relatives, and the bride's family provided a dowry that included a yurt, household goods, clothing, and jewellery.⁴ The bride price was called *kalym* in Kazakh. Additionally, Kazakhs had a custom of polygyny.⁵ Tomohiko Uyama notes that the Kazakhs had a custom of marrying a widowed woman to a relative of the deceased husband, such as the brother of the deceased husband. This marriage custom is called *amengerism*, and it is similar to levirate in anthropology.⁶

In the Kazakh context, the role of women in giving birth and raising children was highly valued. Kundakbayeva notes that in general, a woman's social status always depended on the status of her husband or sons. Officially, women's main duty was to give birth and raise children,

² Janat Kundakbayeva, "Early Soviet Modernization in the Lives of Kazakh Women," *Voices on Central Asia*, October 19, 2022, <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/early-soviet-modernization-in-the-lives-of-kazakh-women/>.

³ Cynthia Werner, "Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (2009): 319-320. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20527710>.

⁴ Werner, 319.

⁵ Werner, 320.

⁶ Tomohiko Uyama, "20 世紀初頭におけるカザフ知識人の世界観 : M. ドゥラトフ 『めざめよ、カザフ!』を中心に" (Weltanschauung of the Kazakh Intelligentsia at the Beginning of the 20th Century: An Analysis of Mir-Ya'qub Dulatov's *Awake, Kazakh!*), *Slavic Studies* 44 (1997): 16, <http://hdl.handle.net/2115/40161>.

and thus, having many children gave a woman a higher status in society.⁷ Moreover, based on traditional Kazakh values, the gender of the baby a woman gave birth to was also crucial. In patriarchal Kazakh society, the preservation of the clan, the male line, and property was an absolute value. Therefore, boys were more desirable than girls, and the mothers of many sons had the highest status.⁸

Kazakh customs in daily life also encouraged gender segregation. In Kazakh tradition, disobedience by a wife—her opposition to the will of her husband—was regarded as a vice.⁹ Kazakh customs specify the different roles of women and men in great detail. To illustrate, the internal space of the yurt was divided into three parts: the right part was for men; the left part was for women; and the central part was for the head of the family, elders, and guests. There were also restrictions on women's behaviour related to their physical condition—such as pregnancy, postpartum bleeding or menstruation.¹⁰ Furthermore, the customs also prescribe ideal ways for women and men to express their emotions. Among Kazakhs, it was considered normal for a man to show anger, rage, stubbornness, or impatience, but never for a woman to do so.¹¹ Conforming to gender stereotypes rooted in custom was considered essential to preserving Kazakh traditions. Deviation from the traditional stereotype—whether due to childlessness, an inability to manage the household, or infidelity—was regarded as a violation of custom.¹²

In traditional Kazakh families, women were not economically independent. Kundakbayeva points out that women had no property rights: they shared property with their husband but had no right to dispose of it. The rights to the herd and livestock products belonged

⁷ Kundakbayeva.

⁸ Kundakbayeva.

⁹ Kundakbayeva.

¹⁰ Kundakbayeva.

¹¹ Kundakbayeva.

¹² Kundakbayeva.

to the male representatives of the clan; the privileges belonged to the elders of the clan.¹³

Therefore, women were always economically dependent on male family members—their fathers, husbands, and sons. In addition, women were also excluded from politics and the judiciary, and did not have equal access in these domains. All decisions regarding nomadic routes, conflict resolution, and relationships with neighbouring tribes were made by men, with the eldest in the family enjoying the greatest rights. In addition, women could not take an oath in court and could almost never be present in person in court; their interests were protected either by their husband or by their husband's relatives.¹⁴

Although traditional Kazakh gender roles place women in a subordinate position to men in many situations, Kazakh women were guaranteed relatively better rights than women in other normative Islamic culture. The behaviour of Kazakh women relied more on the nomadic customary law called *adat* than on Sharia. Paula A. Michaels argues that even though Islam arrived in southern Kazakhstan with the Arab conquests of the 10th century, it took nearly 900 years before this religion penetrated the inner reaches of the steppe. In addition, the Kazakh nomadic way of life largely precluded the emergence of certain institutions and customs associated with Islam. Even though Islamic norms prevailed in some parts of the southern Kazakhstan, much of the territory lacked the mosques and shrines common in Muslim cities, and Kazakh women never adopted the veil.¹⁵

Kundakbayeva also indicates that in daily life, Kazakh women were not secluded as dictated by the norms of Sharia and were not legally deprived of the right to communicate with members of other families without the permission of their husbands. These provisions were fixed

¹³ Kundakbayeva.

¹⁴ Kundakbayeva.

¹⁵ Paula A. Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 309, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178760>.

by adat. Moreover, women often took an active part in solving family problems, and when her husband was absent during long seasonal migrations, a woman was the head of the family.¹⁶ This leadership of women, however, was demonstrated only under very limited conditions. Women's leadership was always hidden not only within the husband's family group but also within the immediate family.

It is notable that the rights of Kazakh women were significantly more restricted than those of Kazakh men in sociocultural, economic, and political dimensions. In particular, the customs of marriage based on adat and their roles within the family reflect a high level of patriarchal norms. Meanwhile, they were able to live a relatively free life compared to women in normative Islamic culture.

Soviet Perspective on Central Asian Women

After the Revolution in 1917, the Soviet leadership implemented a policy of women's "emancipation" based on Marxism. In Soviet Russia and throughout the USSR, they enacted radical legislation to expand women's rights. At the same time, however, the "emancipation" of women in Central Asia was not only aimed at promoting gender equality based on ideological and economic reasons. It also took on a colonial character towards the indigenous societies of Central Asia.

From 1917 to the 1920s, Bolsheviks set women's "emancipation" and empowerment as one of the pivotal issues to establish communist regime. Based on Marxist discourse on equality between women and men, they attempted to enhance women's status. This attempt was established in the form of so-called "women's question" (*zhenskii vopros*). For instance, Kinga

¹⁶ Kundakbayeva.

Szálkai indicates that the Bolsheviks attempted to “emancipate” women regarding some Marxist theorists such as Friedrich Engels, who argued that the subordinated place of women in traditional gender hierarchies is a social construct, and a revolution can bring the liberation of women from the constraints of capitalism and its patriarchal societies. They also considered his remarks that the introduction of women in the wage labour force is vital for empowerment.¹⁷ In other words, Engels and some other Marxists recognised egalitarian participation in the public domain as a key issue for communist state.

In contrast, other Marxists who were eager to deal with gender inequality paid attention to women’s status not only in public but also private domain. Alexandra Kollontai, one of the most iconic figures of Marxist women in this period, argued for a sexual revolution, for the construction of new norms and attitudes regarding relationships between women and men, and for the thorough reform of the traditional concept of the family.¹⁸ Hence, early Soviet Marxist debates focused on gender roles not only in the productive but also the reproductive domains.

In regard to the “women’s question” and Marxist ideology on “emancipation,” the Soviet leadership influenced significantly in the relationship between women and men, both in the public and private sphere. From 1917, a series of decrees were issued in Soviet Russia to strengthen the presence of revolutionary norms even in the most private domains of everyday life. The two decrees issued in 1917 made divorce easier and secularised marriage. In the following year, the 1918 family code was introduced by Marxists such as Kollontai. This code prescribes equality between spouses for choice of the place of residence and separate property, as well as the protection of children born out of wedlock. Women were also granted several political

¹⁷ Kinga Szálkai, “The Soviet Union as a ‘Feminist Colonialist?’ The Women’s Question in Early Soviet Central Asia,” *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2019): 7, <https://doi.org/10.14267/cojourn.2019v4n1a2>.

¹⁸ Szálkai, 7.

and economic rights, including the right to vote and to be elected, and equal pay for equal work, as well as prohibition of polygamy. Moreover, as Mie Nakachi indicates, abortion was legalised in 1920.¹⁹ The Bolsheviks expected that these radical policies would break away from traditional gender roles and usher in true equality between women and men.

Bolsheviks perceived Central Asian women as subject to pre-modern oppression and sought to modernise them in order to create an environment in which Soviet values could exert influence in this region. Szálkai indicates that the expressly Marxist feminist state discourse got intertwined with the process of the “civilizing mission,” and it also involved an attempt to change the very core of Central Asian societies to the image and the benefit of the colonising power. Since Central Asian women took significant roles in the preservation of traditional bonds and networks, Szálkai also notes that Central Asian women were targeted in order to win the “hearts and minds” of traditional societies and deconstruct their networks to make place for the new Soviet structures.²⁰

With this motivation, the Soviet leadership denounced traditional and religious practices surrounding women in Central Asia. By contrasting the Soviet goal of women’s “emancipation” with traditional indigenous customs, Bolsheviks justified their own policies regarding modernisation. For instance, traditional court structures based on customs and religion were eliminated and replaced by new, Soviet-style courts²¹. By the end of the 1920s, a new criminal code guaranteed the new Soviet norms concerning women’s place in families with the

¹⁹ Mie Nakachi, “「女性に自ら決める権利が与えられるべきだ」：ソ連における戦後の人口増加政策と 1955 年の人工妊娠中絶の再合法化” (“A Woman Should be Given the Right to Decide Herself”: Postwar Soviet Pronatalist Policy and the 1955 Re-legalization of Abortion), *Russian and East European Studies* 50 (2021):17, <https://doi.org/10.5823/jarees.2021.1>.

²⁰ Szálkai, 5-6.

²¹ Szálkai, 8.

application of strict sanctions to deter the faithful followers of traditional values from falling out of the line with the new order.²²

One notable example of the Soviet leadership's intervention in women's practices based on ethnic traditions and religion was the *Hujum* campaign. Although Hujum is most well-known for being carried out in Uzbekistan, it was also implemented in other republics of Central Asia. The fact that women in southern Kazakhstan wore the Islamic veil suggests that the campaign was not entirely irrelevant to the Kazakh context. Marianne Kamp points out that the members of the Communist Party thought that if Muslim women removed their face veils and veiling robes, they would become modern members of the new Soviet polity, able to attend schools, take up paid work, and reject long-standing cultural and religious traditions.²³ Yet, the campaign did not succeed as initially expected. Local women faced threats from both the Communist Party, which promoted Hujum, and local authorities, who opposed the eradication of the veil. The campaign's initiators were shocked when newly unveiled women came under violent attack and in some cases were murdered.²⁴

Moreover, the Communist Party sought to become deeply involved in the condition of women in Central Asia by establishing an organisation dedicated to women's questions. In 1919, *Zhenotdel*, the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was established. Barbara Evans Clements indicates that *Zhenotdel* was initially led by a group of women including Inessa Armand, Aleksandra Kollontai, who had begun organising working-class women in the pre-revolutionary years.²⁵ In Central Asia, it

²² Szálkai, 9.

²³ Marianne Kamp, "The Soviet Legacy and Women's Rights in Central Asia," *Current History* 115, no. 783 (2016): 270-271, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48614189>.

²⁴ Kamp, 271.

²⁵ Barbara Evans Clements, "The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (1992): 486, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2500056>.

propagated and supported women's participation in the public sphere and in the economy, fostered their inclusion in education with a special emphasis on literacy, and led cultural and awareness campaigns. These activities of Zhenotdel clearly reflected the Soviet ideology of modernizing indigenous societies.²⁶

Although Moscow's modernisation policy towards Central Asia did expand possibilities for women, it is pivotal to note that it was based on colonial intentions towards indigenous societies to some extent. The Bolsheviks' policies of women's "emancipation" aimed not only to empower women but also to modernise society through the empowerment. This aspect became particularly evident in the process of "enlightening" indigenous women in Central Asia. Since women in Central Asia played a significant role in preserving traditional customs and local social networks, their "emancipation" was also a strategic means for Bolsheviks to more effectively deconstruct the ethnic and religious practices they regarded as "pre-modern."

Women's "Emancipation" in Kazakhstan

After the Bolsheviks came to power in Kazakhstan, they sought to dismantle the traditional gender roles of the nomadic population through legislation, a series of "enlightenment" campaigns involving Zhenotdel, as well as the use of media and public holidays. While these changes brought indigenous women rights and freedoms, it has also been noted that the rapid modernisation imposed considerable burdens on them.

It is noteworthy that the Bolsheviks considered the peculiarities of each region in the Kazakhstan in its attempt to modernise indigenous women through a variety of methods.

Kazakhstan was the second largest republic in the Soviet Union, bordering Russia to the north

²⁶ Szálkai, 9.

and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan to the south. As a result, there was a great deal of diversity in the customs surrounding women in each region. For instance, Kundakbayeva mentions that Zhenotdel in the Ural Province had to work with Kazakhs in *auls*—nomadic villages—as well as Russian women and Ural Cossack women. On the contrary, in the south and southeast, that were annexed to Kazakhstan as a result of the National Delimitation in Central Asia in 1924, the local population had their own culture which was relatively closer to that of the Turkic sedentary peoples of Central Asia. In Syrdarya Region, Alatau District, and Karakalpak Autonomous Region, there was an extremely mixed ethnic composition, including Uzbeks, Uyghurs, and Dungans. Hence, they had a different lifestyle and cultural environment that were influenced by Islamic customs and traditions. In these regions, many women wore the burqa, which is a type of Islamic veil.²⁷

The Bolsheviks first attempted to eradicate traditional marriage and family practices, which they viewed as a “crime based on custom.” For instance, they viewed practices such as polygamy and amengerism as unequal relationships between women and men.²⁸ Therefore, they prohibited such practices through legislative acts. These acts were enacted between the establishment of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (Kyrgyz ASSR, KASSR)²⁹ on the Kazakh steppe in 1920 and its renaming as the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (Kazakh ASSR, KASSR)³⁰ in 1925 after the National Delimitation in 1924.

During this period, a number of legislative acts were adopted, including the Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the KASSR “On the

²⁷ Kundakbayeva.

²⁸ Kundakbayeva.

²⁹ This should not be confused with the Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, which existed in the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan between 1926 and 1936.

³⁰ Kazakh ASSR was elevated from an autonomous republic to a republic, and it was renamed the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR) in 1936.

Cancellation of Kalym” in 1920, the Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of the KASSR “On the Marriage Law of the Kyrgyz” dated January 17, 1921, and the Law “On the Punishability of Polygamy” in 1920. By the mid-1920s, the Bolsheviks had established legal liability for forced marriage in 1922, for bigamy and polygamy in 1924, and for marriage with underage individuals, abduction, and amengerism in 1925.³¹

Moreover, the Bolsheviks attempted to eradicate the patriarchal customs rooted in Kazakh society by establishing new holidays based on communist ideology and women’s “emancipation.” Kundakbayeva notes that they introduced a holiday on March 8, namely the International Day of Women Workers to symbolise the “emancipation” of proletarian women and promote communist ideology. It was introduced to the calendar in 1921 and began to be celebrated in Kazakhstan in 1923, but it did not find resonance with the population.³² Therefore, the Bolsheviks invented a new holiday to reach out more to Kazakh women. In 1924, January 1st was announced as Kalym Cancellation Day. The organisation and conduct of this campaign were carried out in accordance with general trends in the development of the Soviet festive culture. Zhenotdel was also in charge of all parts of the campaign. Although the Kalym Cancellation Day did not immediately mark the abolition of the custom of kalym, it did have delayed results.³³

Even though the Bolsheviks banned Kazakh nomadic customs related to marriage and family by law and promoted their policies through the establishment of a new holiday, it was difficult to quickly transform the indigenous culture into the one that they considered suitable for the Soviet Union. Therefore, they tried to modernise traditional customs by various means. Zhenotdel’s activities were also one of the ways they promote their ideology among local

³¹ Kundakbayeva.

³² Kundakbayeva.

³³ Kundakbayeva.

Kazakh society. Kundakbayeva points out that the idea of the establishment of Zhenotdel was that it would direct all work on the education of women in the spirit of socialism. Although Zhenotdel did not have an immediate impact, it did a tremendous amount of work that had a delayed effect on the status of women in Kazakhstan and throughout the Soviet Union. Zhenotdel appeared in 1921 and functioned until 1930 in Kazakhstan, when it was abolished and reorganised into the Women's Sector of the Agitation and Mass Campaigns Departments of the Party Committees, which lasted until 1934.³⁴ Zhenotdel made an effort in conveying the basic ideas of the Bolsheviks to indigenous women, while taking into account the ethnic and cultural diversity across the vast territory of Kazakhstan.

In addition to the activities of the Zhenotdel, the Bolsheviks developed other “enlightenment” movements targeted at local women in Kazakhstan. The “red yurts” (Kazakh: *qyzyl otau*; Russian: *krasnye yurty*) utilised the yurt, a mobile house of Turkic nomadic peoples, and were used for political “enlightenment” activities carried out in auls. Rebekah Ramsay notes that the idea of the red yurt campaign was articulated as early as 1920, and Zhenotdel was also involved in its subsequent operation.³⁵ The red in its name refers to ideology, while the yurts themselves were presumably white³⁶. The red yurts were most pronounced in Soviet activities among nomadic communities in Kazakhstan from roughly 1926 to 1930, that is, before collectivisation and forced sedentarisation. The institution lasted well after this period, with a number of red yurts still functioning in the mid-1930s, although the intensification of collectivisation led to a lull by the end of 1939.³⁷

³⁴ Kundakbayeva.

³⁵ Rebekah Ramsay, “Nomadic Hearths of Soviet Culture: ‘Women’s Red Yurt’ Campaigns in Kazakhstan, 1925–1935,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, no. 10 (2021): 1941-1942, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1940869>.

³⁶ Ramsay, 1938.

³⁷ Paula A. Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 159.

The early Soviet Kazakh red yurts were managed by women for women in theory, and seemingly to a large extent in practice. The basic red yurt staff consisted of a manager, a medical worker, a literacy instructor, a legal worker and sometimes a cinema projectionist. Even though nearly all medical workers were Russian, most of the other roles do seem to have been filled by Kazakhs. Administrators sought Kazakh women for these roles, even if they did not always succeed in finding them.³⁸ In addition, in the late 1920s, very few men were working in the red yurts. The accounts of the operation of red yurts between 1926 and 1930 show that most of the personnel were Kazakh women. Nevertheless, the list of red yurt workers in Karkaralinsk in 1935 primarily includes Kazakh men, suggesting that the emphasis on women may have weakened by the late 1930s.³⁹

The red yurt campaign sought to persuade the general public of the significance of political “enlightenment” for Kazakh women by collaborating with publications. Ramsay notes that the Kazakh-language women’s magazine, *Aiel Tendigi* (Women’s Equality)⁴⁰, published regular reports of red yurt work in the provinces from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, especially from 1926 to 1929. Since many red yurts subscribed to *Aiel Tendigi* and used it in their literacy outreaches, these published red yurt reports would have contributed to a sense of campaign cohesiveness and sharing of experience.⁴¹ Hence, the red yurts promoted political “enlightenment” for Kazakh women by providing medical and educational services to local residents and collaborating with publications such as *Aiel Tendigi* until the late 1920s. However,

³⁸ Ramsay, 1943.

³⁹ Ramsay, 1943.

⁴⁰ According to an article “‘Beimbet Maylin Was the Editor’: A Magazine That Promoted Women's Equality for Almost a Century” (“Бейімбет Майлин редактор болған”: әйел теңдігін ғасырға жуық насихаттаған журнал) by Balerke Asilkhan published by Bugin.kz, the magazine was first published in 1925 under the title *Qazaqstan Aielderi* and has been published under its original name since 1955, after several name changes. Sara Yesova, Nagima Arykova, Rakhim Sugirov and Sabit Mukanov were involved in editing the magazine.

⁴¹ Ramsay, 1945.

in the late 1930s, forced collectivisation gradually diminished the red yurt campaign. By 1931, the *kolkhoz* had begun to replace the red yurt as the locus of *Aiel Tendigi* reporting on regional work among women.⁴²

Aiel Tendigi was the first Kazakh women's magazine. It targeted women from villages and imposed a completely different paradigm of existence of Kazakh women. Interestingly, the magazine managed to get close to its readers: its articles were written in a subjective manner, and it included individuals' letters.⁴³ Therefore, by emphasising the image of the new Soviet woman and showing consideration for the readers, the Bolsheviks were able to attract the interest of Kazakh women.

As shown by the red yurt campaign's collaboration with the magazine *Aiel Tendigi* to promote the importance of women's "emancipation," the Bolsheviks used agitation, propaganda, and the press to encourage Kazakh women to abandon traditional customs and become modern, Soviet-style women. They portrayed the image of women in the past as being humiliated, deprived of their rights, and crushed by daily life. This was contrasted with the image of new women that was depicted as free, liberated, working, and educated.⁴⁴ Michaels also indicates that newspapers, newsreels, pamphlets, festivals, and public speeches are just some of the venues used to represent traditional Kazakh life as backward, dirty, and primitive. In contrast, Soviet economic, political, and social goals seemingly stood for progress, rationality, and modernity.⁴⁵

Attempts at women's "emancipation" in Kazakhstan were functioning with certain successes until the 1920s. However, in the 1930s, Stalin implemented a thorough economic upheaval, including the cultural revolution, rapid industrialisation, and collectivisation of

⁴² Ramsay, 1957.

⁴³ Kundakbayeva.

⁴⁴ Kundakbayeva.

⁴⁵ Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity," 311.

agriculture, leading to a shift in policies regarding the “emancipation.” Kamp indicates that the collectivisation was ruthless and brutal, and it thoroughly reordered rural populations, devastating the life ways of many Central Asians who practiced nomadic herding, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen. ⁴⁶ The Soviet leadership’s forced modernisation policies in Central Asia cannot escape criticism for depriving the indigenous peoples of their lives and cultural practices.

It is also pivotal to note that women’s “emancipation” policy in the early Soviet era also underwent a transformation in 1930s: As mentioned above, Zhenotdel was abolished and reorganised into a sector of the Party Committees, and the red yurt campaign was gradually replaced by the kolkhoz. However, Kamp points out that not all of the reordering was destructive. To illustrate, collective farms opened primary schools, and local government representatives pressed families to enrol their daughters as well as their sons. Although veils had not been legally banned, they were forbidden in schools. By World War II, mass education produced a steep rise in both female and male literacy all across Central Asia. ⁴⁷

Indeed, Soviet modernisation policy in Kazakhstan improved literacy rates among women and introduced the new Soviet lifestyle to them. Yet, some scholars argue that such rapid changes in gender norms sometimes made local people hostile to the new Soviet value system that were irreconcilably different from traditional values. Adrienne Edgar explores the “emancipation” of women in Turkmenistan, where it is a nomadic region like Kazakhstan, and points out that the most common practical examples of this clash were the cases of bride price, veiling, and arbitrary divorce.

⁴⁶ Kamp, 271.

⁴⁷ Kamp, 271.

To illustrate, the declared reason for the elimination of bride price was to erase the perceived objectification and unequal status of women.⁴⁸ Yet, in some cases, the implementation of the law further decreased the status of daughters within the family and further contributed to the economic dependence of women.⁴⁹ Some locals also simply began paying them secretly.⁵⁰ Moreover, when the Russian Federation family code was adopted in 1918 and women gained the right to divorce from their side, the rising rate of female-initiated divorces aroused the impassioned defence of tradition that the veil had aroused elsewhere.⁵¹ Szálkai points out that in such cases, misunderstandings from the side of the Soviet authorities could frequently lead to the opposite effect of what the leaders of the state meant to achieve.⁵² In addition, she compares these situations to the so-called “double burden” faced by Soviet women, who were torn between wage labour and domestic work, and stated that the former had to carry a double burden between traditional and Soviet values.⁵³

During the 1920s, the Bolsheviks regarded traditional gender norms in Kazakhstan as pre-modern and backward, and sought to modernise them. They prohibited several marriage-related customs through legislation and launched Communist Party-led movements such as the Zhenotdel and red yurts. These reforms achieved a degree of success in improving the social status of Kazakh women, at least until they were transformed during the Stalinist period of the 1930s. However, the abolition of nomadic practices such as bride price and female-initiated divorce created tensions within local communities. In addition, it had the negative effect of placing indigenous women in a dilemma between modernisation and tradition.

⁴⁸ Adrienne Lynn Edgar, “Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-1929,” *Russian Review* 62, no. 1 (2003): 140, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3664562>.

⁴⁹ Edgar, 141.

⁵⁰ Edgar, 142.

⁵¹ Edgar, 144.

⁵² Szálkai, 10.

⁵³ Szálkai, 11.

Ethnic Differences of Women in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev Era

After Stalinism and World War II, the policies regarding women in the Soviet Union did not change significantly. In other words, the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras were a period of stability and stagnation in terms of the status of women. The social position of women in the Soviet Union was distinctive in terms of this double burden, that they theoretically had equal working opportunities as men, but they were also strongly expected to pursue motherhood and take on the burden of childbirth and care work at home. Yet, women's status in the Soviet Union has been investigated primarily from a Slavic, and particularly Russian, perspective, and less from a Central Asian one. There are limited studies that focus on women's status in Kazakhstan during this period. Therefore, examining existing research not only on Kazakhstan but also Central Asia as a whole in this period can provide some insight during this period.

Nancy Lubin examines how gender and ethnic aspects influenced employment of indigenous women in wage labour in Soviet Central Asia. She notes that, despite the comparatively high number of women employed in the labour force, women in Central Asian republics formed an extremely high percentage of the non-working population. Among the working population in Soviet Central Asia, women predominate in the lower-skilled and manual jobs, and both disparities are particularly pronounced in respect of women of the indigenous nationalities. Moreover, inequality in skill levels between women and men were even more pronounced when viewed regarding ethnicity. Non-indigenous or Slavic women tended to dominate the higher-skilled positions in industrial and certain other key sectors where women were employed.⁵⁴ Hence, it is essential to take into account not only gender but also ethnic

⁵⁴ Nancy Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions," *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 2 (1981): 184-185, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/151335>.

aspects in order to understand the actual situation when considering the status of women in Soviet Central Asia.

Basically, scholars who have explored labour history in this region agree on the existence of gendered/ethnic work hierarchies between indigenous Central Asian women and Slavic women. Interestingly, however, there are different types of interpretation for these hierarchies among them. On the one hand, Lubin points out that the hierarchies did not necessarily imply discrimination against women, nor did it prevent indigenous women from entering the labour force or higher-skilled jobs. She notes that many Central Asian women deliberately remained in household work or in lower-skilled jobs by preference, in spite of efforts to draw them into social production or training programmes.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Negar Elodie Behzadi and Lucia Direnberger indicate that Soviet ideology was a central site for the production of gender and ethnic hierarchies, as experienced by women and men through the socio-spatial organisation of work and especially through the exclusion of Central Asian women from specific types of labour.⁵⁶ Overall, despite the radical changes in the position of women in the Soviet Union, the aim of gender equality in Central Asia was only partly achieved, and furthermore, the achievement was especially limited among indigenous women.

The circumstances of Central Asian women about motherhood and childbirth differed significantly from Slavic women as well. Michaels states that after the Soviet government legalised abortion for the first time in 1920, women having abortions in Kazakhstan came almost exclusively from the Slavic population.⁵⁷ Later, according to Nakachi, abortion was prohibited in

⁵⁵ Lubin, 186.

⁵⁶ 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): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1699777>.

⁵⁷ Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity," 312.

1936 and re-legalised in 1955.⁵⁸ However, there was the almost total irrelevance of legalised abortion for the indigenous population. In fact, Kazakh women married younger, had more children, and lived in a society that deemed abortion a terrible taboo.⁵⁹ The state's pro-natalist campaign also affected Kazakh women differently from Slavic women. Since Kazakh women had more children than Slavic women in general, they had more benefit from the pro-natalist campaign. Therefore, although the abortion policy affected the Slavic population of Kazakhstan almost entirely to the exclusion of the Kazakhs, the pro-natalism campaign had a considerable impact on the indigenous population due to its higher birth rate.⁶⁰ Legalisation and prohibition of abortion, as well as other pro-natalist policies in the Soviet Union had influence on indigenous Kazakh women and Slavic women in significantly different ways.

The status of women in the Soviet Union remained relatively stable in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, with little significant political transformation. However, in terms of participation in wage labour, it is difficult to assert that indigenous Central Asian women occupied a position of equality with Slavic women or indigenous men, whether this inequality was intentional or not. With regard to population policies, although abortion was legalised, Kazakh women rarely exercised this right. Meanwhile, they benefited more from pro-natalist policies. Hence, the social status and needs of women differed considerably between indigenous women in Central Asia and Slavic women.

This chapter reviewed traditional gender norms and the social status of women in Kazakhstan and outlined the historical background and methods of the Bolsheviks' movement aimed at women's "emancipation," which began in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Kazakh

⁵⁸ Nakachi, 2.

⁵⁹ Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity," 312.

⁶⁰ Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity," 321.

women traditionally had limited rights than men and were responsible for reproductive roles such as childbirth and domestic labour. However, they were able to live a relatively free lifestyle compared to Muslim women in southern Central Asia and the Middle East. After Kazakhstan came under the influence of the Bolsheviks, the gender roles of nomadic society were pushed towards intensive modernisation. As a result, women gained more rights, but they also suffered disadvantages due to the conflict between modernisation and traditional values. Following that period, on the contrary, the status of women in Kazakhstan during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era did not change significantly. Yet, indigenous women of Central Asia, including Kazakh women, continued to experience relatively low status in productive labour, due to both gender and ethnic factors.

Chapter 2

Rethinking Perestroika: From the Perspective of Ethnicity and Gender

This chapter provides an overview of perestroika and reassesses its impacts through ethnic and gendered perspectives. Perestroika initiated by Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership in the mid-1980s accelerated reforms across economic, political, and cultural domains. The ambiguous definition of perestroika has allowed for a wide range of interpretations, both at the time and in subsequent years. The impact of perestroika significantly differed depending on the perspectives and positions of people who lived in the Soviet Union. In Kazakhstan, perestroika marked the emergence of ethnic and national consciousness, and its evaluation differed greatly between the general public and the elites who were actively involved in the reform process. Furthermore, the freedom of speech introduced during this period made it possible to openly discuss patriarchal and conservative gender norms, which had been incompatible with the prevailing values of Soviet society.

Overview on Perestroika

Perestroika was the economic, political, and sociocultural reforms which started in 1985, 6 years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the Central Committee and the only one president of the Soviet Union, aimed to tackle the stagnation of economy, politics, and society. However, the goals of these reforms were often vague, and led to different interpretations among various positions, including reformists and conservatives.

Gorbachev had a desire to introduce reform policies, despite the concept of perestroika being vague and not clear enough. He states, “We are often asked what we want of perestroika. What are our final goals? We can hardly give a detailed, exact answer. It’s not our way to engage

in prophesying and trying to predestinate all the architectural elements of the public building we will erect in the process of perestroika. But in principle I can say that the end result of perestroika is clear to us. It is a thorough renewal of every aspect of Soviet life”⁶¹ Dadabaev mentions that the departure point for perestroika was more a negation and critique of past and present problems than a clear understanding of how things should be improved.⁶²

In the beginning of perestroika, Gorbachev announced a slogan *uskorenie* (acceleration) during the plenum of the CPSU in April 1985. This slogan was modest and vague, so most people did not understand its proper meaning, except for a very few people, including Gorbachev. On the one hand, those who identified themselves as “reformists,” among the core group of communists supporting Gorbachev, regarded it as an improvement on labour efficiency, adhering to new technological imperatives and increasing the levels of production. On the other hand, the conservative interpretation of the term emphasised strengthening discipline in line with policies established by Gorbachev’s predecessor, the fourth General Secretary Yuri Andropov, and fighting corruption.⁶³ Therefore, these ambiguous notions allowed a variety of interpretations on perestroika.

At the plenum of the CPSU in January 1987, Gorbachev introduced a new slogan *glasnost* to replace *uskorenie*. *Glasnost* was meant to facilitate the transition from a command economy to performance and market-based tools through openness and democratisation in all spheres of life. It also implied the appointments of heads of various organisations based on internal elections and the introduction of “democratic” principles.⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that the

⁶¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (Harper & Row, 1987), 21.

⁶² Timur Dadabaev, “Evaluations of Perestroika in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Public Views in Contemporary Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 2 (2016): 183, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48610426>.

⁶³ Dadabaev, 183.

⁶⁴ Dadabaev, 183.

freedom of speech brought about by glasnost stimulated the spread of ethnic consciousness and Islam in Kazakhstan, which in turn led to more open discussions about conservative gender norms. Furthermore, the adoption of the Western gender norms gave rise to more patriarchal representations of women.

During the perestroika period, the Soviet government introduced a market economy. The economic reform liberated entrepreneurial activities, offering opportunities for small enterprises to participate in the economy. In addition, the reform led to the emergence of new forms of ownership. Darrell Slider points out that the Soviet government enacted the Law on Individual Labour Activity in November 1986 and the Law on Cooperation in June 1988 to eliminate the state monopoly over most economic activity. In theory, cooperatives were owned by their members and were supported to be free from the control of the ministries and other government agencies. Cooperatives had the flexibility and incentive to seek out unmet needs and shortages that are legion in the Soviet economy.⁶⁵

The expansion of cooperatives varied from republic to republic. Cooperatives spread rapidly in Armenia, the Baltic and Georgia, while they developed only sporadically in Central Asia. Slider mentions that these differences reflect a wide variety of factors, but the most significant ones seem to be historical and cultural patterns conducive to private ownership and favourable or hostile attitudes on the part of local government officials. Additionally, the degree of urbanisation was another factor since cooperatives were more numerous in cities than in the countryside.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Darrell Slider, "Embattled Entrepreneurs: Soviet Cooperatives in an Unreformed Economy," *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 5 (1991): 797, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/152450>.

⁶⁶ Slider, 798.

Meanwhile, cooperatives faced criticism from a variety of directions in society at the time. For instance, they were criticised for high prices, low quality, and excessive profits. They were also blamed for a wide range of general social and economic problems, including inflation, inequality, shortages of goods and human resources, and even crime. Slider notes that the criticism against cooperatives was often about issues broader than the role of themselves.⁶⁷ Moreover, in Central Asia, criticism against the cooperatives was combined with ethnic hostility, resulting in violent incidents, especially against the cooperatives run by traders from the Caucasus. One of these incidents occurred in June 1989 in Novy Uzen,⁶⁸ a city in southwest Kazakhstan, when the protesters destroyed 27 cooperatives and killed 11 cooperative workers in June 1989.⁶⁹ Hence, the economic reforms of perestroika were not necessarily smooth in Kazakhstan, as the cooperatives became the subject of various forms of criticism and attacks.

By the 1980s, the Soviet Union had experienced stagnation across political, economic, and social aspects, and hence, it was a natural development for Gorbachev to attempt reforms through perestroika. The ambiguity of his slogans has led to the diverse assessments of perestroika up to the present day. Additionally, while perestroika did indeed bring about a series of reforms such as the introduction of a market economy and the implementation of elections, some scholars argue that these reforms ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and some others point out that they undermined trust in communist ideology.

⁶⁷ Slider, 804.

⁶⁸ According to Nargiza Ryskulova's article "Жанаозен - город, с которого начались протесты в Казахстане. Что о нем нужно знать" (Zhanaozen – The City Where the Protests in Kazakhstan Began. What You Need to Know About It) from *BBC News Russian*, Zhanaozen was built in 1964, and it was called Novy Uzen from 1968 to 1993.

⁶⁹ Slider, 805.

The Reception of Perestroika in Kazakhstan

The evaluation of perestroika in Central Asia also differs depending on the position of individuals regarding the reform process. On the one hand, it contributed to the independence of the Central Asian republics and allowed many current leaders to rise to power, which suggests a positive legacy. On the other hand, it caused significant hardships that make it difficult to praise openly. In addition to these facts, it is noteworthy that perestroika was a period that sparked the formation of ethnic identity in Kazakhstan.

The post-Soviet Central Asian governments have not evaluated perestroika in a clear stance. On the one hand, perestroika brought about reforms that eventually resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and independence for the republics. The political leadership of many Central Asian countries still largely consists of individuals who came to power under the influence of perestroika. On the other hand, the intense reforms of perestroika brought significant challenges to Central Asian people, and this makes governments and historians difficult to praise and/or support perestroika.⁷⁰

Dadabaev conducted interviews with ordinary people in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan from 2005 to 2014, and he pointed out that they commemorate perestroika in the following three ways. First, one of the most representative narratives is that the perestroika years were a time of confusion and uncertainty, compared to the “good old days” before perestroika. Respondents emphasised that prior to perestroika, the economy and food-stock production seemed to be functioning, and many goals set by the government appeared to be achieved, unlike the anti-alcohol campaign of the perestroika period.⁷¹ Some Kyrgyz respondents often described perestroika as the beginning of a series of chaotic and unstable years characterised by frequent

⁷⁰ Dadabaev, 182.

⁷¹ Dadabaev, 184.

changes of government and indecisive governmental actions. In Kazakhstan, the majority of those who felt that perestroika had little or no positive impact on their lives evaluated it as a sort of suffering that they had to overcome to achieve the development they feel they enjoy in present-day Kazakhstan.⁷²

Second, some others supported the discourse that perestroika as a reform process was a very positive development although they recognise that the outcomes were not those for which they hoped. This view was supported by those who were allowed to play some parts in perestroika, unlike the general public who felt hardships of everyday life associated with perestroika.⁷³

Third, some others insisted that perestroika was pivotal in its liberating aspects, and it was the beginning of the process of deconstructing the state. For them, the weakening and eventual dissolution of the Soviet state led to betterment of the population's well-being. Also, they mentioned the significance of the newly acquired freedoms of speech and self-expression.⁷⁴

Interestingly, however, even though they evaluate perestroika positively, they do not refer to issues of ethnic liberation and religious freedom as primary factors that stimulated the dissolution of the Soviet state. Dadabaev indicates that there are several factors for this. First, while religious freedom and ethnic identities were regulated to construct Soviet identity, people in Central Asia were still able to follow their ethnic and religious beliefs on a daily basis. Second, with the increase in religious extremism after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the public evaluation of religion and the importance of returning to religious life in the public sphere

⁷² Dadabaev, 185.

⁷³ Dadabaev, 187.

⁷⁴ Dadabaev 187-188.

has undergone a shift towards support for moderate Islam.⁷⁵ As a result, those who have positive views on perestroika do not refer ethnic and religious freedom as a primary aspect.

In Kazakhstan, the necessity of economic reform was emphasised in the public discourse in the beginning of the perestroika period, but it gradually turned to pay more attention to the building of national identity. Morozova conducted research on the perestroika period in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. She argues that although the narratives about perestroika by non-intelligentsia and non-elitist social strata—peasants, workers and low-scale officials—are very different from the intelligentsia story, their voices do not find adequate representation. The majority of her interviewees from ordinary social background stated that they never thought of their ethnicity and ethnic tensions during socialism and only started recognising it as a problem during perestroika, or even after 1991.⁷⁶ In other words, perestroika was a significant period for ordinary people in Kazakhstan to recognise their ethnic and national identities.

Meanwhile, it is crucial to note that nationalist movements existed among the elite in Kazakhstan since the early Soviet period. Umbetalieva points out that from the beginning of the 1920s, Moscow had little faith in the Kazakhstani political elite, who continued to be actively engaged with establishing the imagined Central Asia Republic independent from the Soviet Russia. Therefore, the republican national elite was deprived of decision-making abilities in the political sphere. Only two ethnic Kazakhs have been promoted to the post of First Secretary of the Kazakh SSR Communist Party.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Dadabaev, 188.

⁷⁶ Irina Morozova, “On the Causes of Socialism Deconstruction: Elitist Discourses and People’s Perceptions in Contemporary Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia,” *Asian Studies Newsletter* 60 (2012): 7, <https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/causes-socialisms-deconstruction-elitist-discourses-peoples-perceptions>.

⁷⁷ Tolganay Umbetalieva, “Kazakhstan and Perestroika: Was a Chance at ‘Heroism’ Lost?,” *Asian Studies Newsletter* 60 (2012): 14, <https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/kazakhstan-perestroika-was-chance-heroism-lost>.

Furthermore, some people in Kazakhstan remember perestroika in association with the protest called Zheltoqsan—which means “December” in Kazakh—which occurred in December 1986 to protest Gorbachev’s decision regarding the first secretary of Kazakhstan’s Communist Party. In 1986, Gorbachev dismissed the first secretary Dinmukhamed Konayev, who had served from 1964 and was an ethnic Kazakh, and appointed Gennady Kolbin, an outsider to the republic and an ethnic Russian. In her article in the *Washington Post*, Celestine Bohlen points out that Kolbin’s arrival in Kazakhstan was seen at the time as a sign of Moscow’s growing impatience with nationalist sensibilities, particularly when they coincided with economic inefficiency. In a major speech of this period, Gorbachev came down hard against “ethnic arrogance” and challenged the “mechanical” practice of assigning jobs by nationality.⁷⁸

The locals in Alma-Ata⁷⁹, the then capital of Kazakhstan, were disappointed with this affair, and they began protesting in Brezhnev Square.⁸⁰ Public displeasure with the appointment led to demonstrations that initially consisted of several hundred students but later grew to a crowd of several thousand. Consequently, troops from the Ministry of Internal Affairs oppressed the protesters, causing many casualties. In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, this incident is regarded as the beginning of the public’s demand for independence and their desire to do away with old patterns of political appointments and governance.⁸¹

Dadabaev highlights that although the protesters were indicating their disapproval of the removal of Konayev and his replacement by Kolbin, the students’ demonstration was construed

⁷⁸ Celestine Bohlen, “Gorbachev’s Reforms Shock One Entrenched Republic,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 1987, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/02/22/gorbachevs-reforms-shock-one-entrenched-republic/9a75497b-0604-4a32-af9c-2d846a7dd735/>.

⁷⁹ According to the description of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Russian Federation, Alma-Ata was the capital of Kazakhstan from 1929 to 1997. After the independence of Kazakhstan, it was renamed Almaty.

⁸⁰ Brezhnev Square was renamed and is currently Republic Square.

⁸¹ Dadabaev, 191.

as ethnically motivated.⁸² Likewise, an article written by Bruce Pannier and published by Radio Free Europe/Radil Liberty in 2006, on the 20th anniversary of the Zheltoqsan Protest, also suggests that the protest included ethnic demands. The article quotes interviews with people who participated in the protests at the time. One of the interviewees, Kalelkhan Adilkhan Uliy, was visiting some friends who were studying at the university in Alma-Ata when the protest started. He remembers the first day of protest as follows: “We used bed sheets to make banners, ... We had four large ones with slogans. The slogans on them were ‘The Kazakh Nation Deserves a Kazakh Leader,’ ‘Return Our Leader to Us,’ and ‘Kazakhstan Belongs to Kazakhs.’”⁸³ Hence, Zheltoqsan Protest originally started to oppose the dismissal of Konayev and the appointment of Kolbin but subsequently included elements of an ethnic movement.

Gorbachev introduced perestroika and some other slogans in this period with vague and modest meanings, and this allowed ordinary people in the Soviet Union to evaluate and commemorate perestroika in various manners. The situation in Central Asia is similar to this. On the one hand, some people who actively engaged in reform of perestroika tend to evaluate it positively as a process of liberation. On the other hand, some others acknowledge the perestroika era as the time of confusion and uncertainty, compared to the “good old days” before 1985. Although a number of investigations have been conducted on perestroika, there are some questions remaining about Central Asian republics. In particular, it is crucial to deeply investigate how the awareness of ethnic identity increased during this period in Kazakhstan.

⁸² Dadabaev, 190.

⁸³ Bruce Pannier, “Kazakhstan: Zheltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 14, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1073453.html>.

Perestroika from Women's Perspective

The Soviet policies of equality between women and men in the workforce brought about women's participation in wage labour, and the employment rate of women in the Soviet Union was one of the highest in the world. However, in addition to productive labour, Soviet women were also strongly expected to perform reproductive labour, which are housework and childbirth as mothers. This "double burden" is a notable characteristic of women's positions in the communist bloc. This condition surrounding women marked a shift during the perestroika period. Meanwhile, discussions on women's positions in the Soviet Union have focused on the Slavic regions, and there have been limited studies on women in Kazakhstan during this period. Therefore, this section focuses on a comparative study of the status of women before and after perestroika, but it must be noted that the existing literature is mostly limited to overviews of the Soviet Union as a whole.

In the Soviet Union, there were some specific characteristics of the socialist economy, but one of the most pivotal parts of it was full employment of women. Numbers of scholars have pointed out that the Soviet Union had one of the highest rates of employed women. Moghadam points out that the socialist countries not only had rates of female labour force participation, but the most equitable male-female ratios in paid employment⁸⁴. Large numbers of relatively unproductive ex-peasants and women were transformed into productive contributors to a modern industrial base⁸⁵.

Moreover, the government aimed to ease the burden of child-rearing on women by setting state-sponsored childcare. This allowed women to take employment in the state or cooperative

⁸⁴ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Gender and Restructuring: Perestroika, the 1989 Revolutions, and Women," *WIDER Working Papers* 87 (1990): 6, <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/gender-and-restructuring>.

⁸⁵ Moghadam, 9.

sector.⁸⁶ Even though this socialisation of housework took place to a limited extent, Soviet policies encouraged women to participate in the wage labour and aimed to reduce the burden of care work on women. This was a function both of the strong ideological commitment of governments to equal economic and social rights for men and women, and the high demand for labour in the economy.⁸⁷

Although the Soviet government considered the realisation of gender equality in wage labour to be pivotal, it also intended to raise fertility rates to address labour shortages. Nakachi indicates that the Soviet government legalised abortion in 1920, leading the world on the right to abortion. However, during Stalinism and the Second World War, the government shifted its policies from protecting women's rights to encouraging childbirth and emphasising motherhood. In 1936, abortion was legally prohibited again to deal with the decline in population caused by the war and to increase the birth rate.⁸⁸ Even though abortion was re-legalised in 1955, it remained important that women give birth and fulfil their role as mothers. Moreover, the Soviet leadership provided economic and social incentives to women who had more children.

Therefore, a considerable number of Soviet women were exhausted by the burden of wage labour and the pressure to fulfil their roles as mothers. This double burden contradicted the gender equality guaranteed on paper. As a result, many Soviet women expressed yearning for a traditional female role centred around the family and the home. Yet, Katrina Vanden Heuvel points out that national polls at the time show that only 20 percent of Soviet women would quit their jobs even if they could afford to.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Moghadam, 9.

⁸⁷ Moghadam, 11.

⁸⁸ Nakachi, 2.

⁸⁹ Katrina Vanden Heuvel, "Glasnost for Women?," *Nation*, 250, no. 22 (1990): 774.

Nevertheless, the economic, political and cultural reforms introduced during the perestroika period affected the role of women. Vanden Heuvel points out that the introduction of a market economy required women to work for long hours or excluded them, especially those who have children. For instance, when women tried to take advantage of their legal rights to work fewer hours or on a part-time schedule, employers were reluctant to accommodate their requests and women were under pressure to quit.⁹⁰

It is also crucial to note that perestroika's encouragement of free speech has sparked debates about values that are significantly different from the typical gender norms of the Soviet era. Vanden Heuvel and Moghadam point out that glasnost allowed Soviet citizens to voice patriarchal prejudices once banned as bourgeois or counterrevolutionary. Also, Gorbachev's ambivalent positions on the role of women in political and economic life, along with the social policies proposed by the CPSU and the Congress of People's Deputies in early 1990, further strengthened the view that only women are responsible for children and housework.⁹¹

Furthermore, women's participation in higher education and wage labour began to be regarded as a factor that destabilised marriage and the family and ultimately reduced birth rate. Vanden Heuvel noted that the state-controlled news media frequently blamed "over-emancipated, masculinised women" for social ills from juvenile delinquency to divorce.⁹² Moghadam indicates that on the one hand, the rising educational and occupational attainments among women in the Soviet Union led to greater sexual equality within the family, a more democratic pattern of family relationship, and a higher degree of family stability. On the other hand, in the last years of the Soviet Union, rising levels of female education and labour force participation in the urban

⁹⁰ Vanden Heuvel, 779.

⁹¹ Vanden Heuvel, 773; Moghadam, 27.

⁹² Vanden Heuvel, 773.

industrial regions have been accompanied by lower rates of marriage, later marriage age, rising rates of divorce, and declining birth rates.⁹³ These trends became a growing concern, and Soviet authorities began to consider whether women's "emancipation" fundamentally contradicted family stability. However, it is unclear whether they indicated the evidence that women's participation in the public domain led to the destabilisation of marriage and family, as well as the decline in birth rates.

Additionally, the introduction of elections as part of perestroika contributed to the decline in the proportion of women in the political domain. The multi-candidate elections in 1989, the freest since 1917, produced a Congress of People's Deputies in which fewer than 15 percent of the deputies were women, as compared with 33 percent under previous governments. In some local elections, the proportion of women elected declined as well. Interestingly, however, this decline in female political representation sparked a debate among women about developing affirmative action programs during the transitional period to help more women get into the grassroots Soviets.⁹⁴

Moreover, the adoption of Western values during perestroika led to the introduction of beauty contests in the Soviet Union. Melanie Ilic discusses how beauty contests came to be held at the end of the Soviet Union and the sociocultural values that accompanied them. Even though beauty contests were never an official part of Soviet culture in the pre-Gorbachev period,⁹⁵ Soviet women began to compete in domestic and international beauty contests by the late 1980s.⁹⁶ The first "Moscow Beauty" was held in 1988 and the first "Miss USSR" in 1989,⁹⁷ and

⁹³ Moghadam, 24.

⁹⁴ Moghadam, 28.

⁹⁵ Melanie Ilic, "Women and Competition in State Socialist Societies: Soviet-era Beauty Contests," in *Competition in Socialist Society*, ed. Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic (Routledge, 2014), 4, accepted manuscript (post-print), <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/1258/>.

⁹⁶ Ilic, 6.

⁹⁷ Ilic, 7.

similar beauty contests had already been staged in other regions and republics of the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ Women from Central Asia were taking part in national beauty contests as well as the international Miss Asia competitions that were held in London and elsewhere.⁹⁹

By the time beauty contests were beginning to be staged in the Soviet Union, such competitions had already been criticised for many years in both socialist and capitalist Blocs. In socialist societies, prior to perestroika, Soviet ideological thinking had condemned the idea of the beauty contests as degrading to women and symptomatic of capitalist exploitation.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, in capitalist societies, feminist activists criticised the demeaning nature of judging women on the basis of their physical attributes, and in 1968, activists staged protests outside the Miss America contest.¹⁰¹ After the implementation of perestroika, however, women from the Soviet Union began to appear in beauty contests. Ilic points out that Gorbachev attempted to rebuild the image of the Soviet Union in the international arena, and his revised notions of women's roles and appearance can be seen as part of a broader attempt to inculcate new social and cultural values in Soviet society.¹⁰²

The growing presence of beauty contests in the Soviet Union sparked a debate over beauty concepts and conflicting values about the representation of women. Some of the staged performances at the beauty contests drew scathing comments from spectators that partly reflected an on-going debate about the competing cultural values of the Soviet Union and the West.¹⁰³ Although the most widespread construct of Soviet female beauty had been that it was an inner

⁹⁸ Ilic, 11.

⁹⁹ Ilic, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ilic, 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Ilic, 6.

¹⁰² Ilic, 6.

¹⁰³ Ilic, 8-9.

quality, not related to outward physical appearance, contestants still had to meet certain age and physiological criteria.¹⁰⁴

Soviet women's magazines were not always favourable to beauty contests. In the final section of the Moscow Beauty-88 competition, the contestants were dressed in luxurious fur coats, which were then casually thrown aside, leaving the contestants standing in revealing swimming costumes, but without make-up and bare-footed.¹⁰⁵ As Ilic points out, the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* questions how such a spectacle was supposed to raise the prestige of women.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, in Central Asia, cultural, religious, and gender values created conflicts over women participating in beauty contests. In March 1989, one of the preliminary competitions for the first Miss USSR contest was held in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajik SSR. Takhmina Dzheraeva won the Miss Cinema and was allowed to compete in the Miss USSR. However, Dzheraeva had been warned by her father that he would disown her and would not allow her to return home if she appeared in a bathing costume on the national stage. As a result, during the television broadcast final of the Miss USSR competition, Dzheraeva was filmed in a swimsuit looking distinctly uncomfortable and wiping a tear from her eye.¹⁰⁷

From the time of perestroika, Soviet women's bodies began to be subjected to sexist values along with the introduction of beauty contests. Ilic indicates that the late 1980s marked the beginning of an overt sexualisation, commodification and commercialisation particularly of young women in Soviet society, culture and the economy.¹⁰⁸ Some of the contestants have also

¹⁰⁴ Ilic, 16-17.

¹⁰⁵ Ilic 11.

¹⁰⁶ Masha Musina, "Королевские испытания" (The Royal Trials), *Rabotnitsa*, August 1988, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Ilic, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Ilic, 20.

described that there were unwanted sexualisation and commodification of their bodies.¹⁰⁹

Importantly, at this late stage of the Soviet Union's history, so-called "men's magazines" such as *Playboy* were still banned and even women's magazines were carefully scanned for any images considered to be potentially pornographic. Therefore, the appearance of sexualised women in the public domain was a novelty.¹¹⁰ Ilic quotes several remarks of journalists at the time and points out that the wholesale adoption of Western practices was not necessarily a sign of political or cultural advancement.¹¹¹

Perestroika was a period in which wide-ranging reforms were introduced, eventually leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These reforms brought about considerable changes in the women's social status and gender roles. However, the question of how perestroika affected indigenous women in Kazakhstan, remains unanswered. In order to evaluate perestroika from a diverse perspective, it is essential to consider its impact not only on the Slavic regions, but also on non-European regions and ethnicity groups in the Soviet Union.

This chapter has explored the era of perestroika from the perspectives of Central Asia, as well as women across the Soviet Union. Evaluations of perestroika in Central Asia are considerably various depending on the relationships people had with the reform. Those who were actively involved in perestroika tend to assess it positively, whereas other citizens remember it as a time of hardship. Additionally, perestroika had considerable impacts on the roles and status of women. The introduction of a market economy threatened the labour rights of women that had previously been protected by the state, and the implementation of elections did not result in encouraging women's political participation. The liberalisation of speech enabled Soviet citizens

¹⁰⁹ Ilic, 21-22.

¹¹⁰ Ilic, 20.

¹¹¹ Ilic, 20-21.

to express patriarchal values in the public sphere and promoted the implementation of beauty contests. Meanwhile, there remains a lack of existing research analysing perestroika in Kazakhstan from a feminist perspective. As Kazakh women were subject to different roles and status compared to Slavic women, this highlights the need for intersectional approaches to the study of perestroika.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Soviet Periodicals on Kazakhstan during Perestroika

This chapter examines representations of Kazakh women and women in Kazakhstan in Soviet periodicals during the perestroika period. The analysis is based on articles selected from Soviet state-sponsored women's magazines, newspapers, and a news agency categorised under four thematic perspectives: "conservatism and religion," "ethnic consciousness," "labour," and "beauty standards." The chapter begins with an overview of the role of women's magazines in the Soviet era, followed by a description of the methodological approach. It then proceeds to analyse selected articles under each of the four thematic categories. Through this analysis, the chapter highlights how reforms associated with perestroika and glasnost were reflected in representations of the gender roles of women in Kazakhstan, while also revealing how the rise of ethnic consciousness and religious values intersected with women's roles and representations in Soviet periodicals.

The Roles of Women's Magazines

The first section discusses the role of Soviet women's magazines and how their representations shifted following the introduction of perestroika. From the early Soviet period, state-sponsored women's magazines served as an important medium for conveying the ideological messages of the Communist Party to women. In particular, women in the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union often had low literacy rates, and these magazines played a major role in their "enlightenment." Even after Stalinism and World War II, women's magazines continued to be a crucial source of information and communication for women. However, from the late

1980s, the introduction of alternative values through perestroika led to a shift in both the topics covered in these magazines and the representations of women.

Sirinyok-Dolgaryova notes that since the early 1920s, Soviet women's magazines became a powerful tool to communicate the ideological messages of the ruling Communist Party, and at the same time expressed the major concerns and positions regarding women's status in the society.¹¹² *Krestyanka* has been published since 1922, along with *Rabotnitsa* that has been published since 1914. These two magazines are the most renowned women's magazines in Soviet and post-Soviet eras. *Rabotnitsa*'s circulation exceeded 12 million, and *Krestyanka* had 6 millions of copies in different years.¹¹³

Women's magazines were used as a means to "enlighten" women shortly after the Bolsheviks came to power. Sirinyok-Dolgaryova points out that in the 1920s, women's magazines played a crucial role in the process of converting peasant's women into active followers of the new ideology, since they presented a new life put into simple words. In this period, their illiteracy was an obstacle to spreading Soviet ideology among them. However, educated opinion leaders managed to deal with this problem by reading aloud the magazines to illiterate women, who were supposed to believe in these spoken words of Soviet propaganda.¹¹⁴ In Slavic regions such as Russia and Ukraine, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka* fulfilled this role, while in Central Asia, women's magazines were also published in the languages of each republic's main ethnic group. In Kazakhstan, for instance, *Aiel Tendigi*, mentioned in the first chapter, played a similar role.

¹¹² Katerina Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, "Transformation of Women's Representation in Media of Transitional Post-Soviet Society: Study of Women's Magazines 'Rabotnitsa' and 'Krestyanka', 1971-2010," *Zarządzanie Mediami* 2, no. 4 (2014): 170. <https://doi.org/10.4467/23540214ZM.14.013.3575>.

¹¹³ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 170.

¹¹⁴ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 172.

In the mid-1930s, Socialist Realism emerged in the Soviet Union as a literary style, cultivating the idea of artists as so-called “engineers of the souls.”¹¹⁵ This also affected women’s magazines. Both *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka* were filled with representations of happy and healthy Soviet female workers. However, their media portrayals contradicted reality. In fact, these hopeful women in reality were outnumbered by devastated poor people, who struggled through hunger caused by collectivisation.¹¹⁶

Although women’s magazines in the Soviet Union portrayed contradicted descriptions and images of women compared to the reality, these magazines played an educational role and remained connected to their readers even in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era. According to Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, in the years of the Soviet Union’s stability from the 1950s to the 1970s, educating and informing were main goals of the press. Moreover, the women’s magazines were the forum to communicate and educate in many fields, although in quite limited amounts.¹¹⁷ Yet, from the mid-1980s, the introduction of perestroika allowed publishing media to gradually reflect new values. The changes in values and social behaviours became obvious since the mid-1980s, and the print press as the most powerful medium since the early times of Soviet propaganda reflected the changes and affected the social views of the people mostly towards the Western values of overwhelming consumerism and commercialism.¹¹⁸

The media transformation led by perestroika became even more pronounced after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The topics that appeared in women’s magazines also shifted to incorporate more Western values. Sirinyok-Dolgaryova’s analysis on *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka* from 1970 to 2010 developed the twenty-one topic categories on articles: health, fashion,

¹¹⁵ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 172

¹¹⁶ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 172.

¹¹⁷ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 173-174.

¹¹⁸ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 174-175.

professional life, motherhood/child rearing, home/housekeeping, sex/romantic relations, family, psychological issues, political/ideological views, history, international life, art/culture/sport, religion, beauty, cooking, gardening, personal profiles, science, social issues, humour/entertaining, and stories about men, as well as six categories of women's portraying: gender and social roles, jobs representation, body posture, gaze, beauty types, and occupational roles. Her research found that the major topics of stories in pre-independent times were professional life (11% of all content), politics/ideology (10%) and social issues (10%). On the other hand, these topics shifted dramatically to beauty (10%) and art/culture/sport (10%) after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁹ In other words, post-Soviet women's magazines became less political and began to feature more consumer-oriented topics.

In addition, the portrayal of women in visual materials changed significantly as well. Soviet magazines tended to portray women showing them mostly in gender/social roles (79% of images including ads), and the proportion declined to 60% in post-Soviet magazines. Moreover, the representation of women at their jobs also decreased from 66% to 41%. Despite three major areas Soviet women worked at were farming/agriculture, heavy industry, and art/music/media, the post-Soviet female professionals were mostly portrayed in art/music/media and politics. The beauty types of Soviet women had a natural and non-trendy look; cute women's beauty type was presented in post-Soviet magazines.¹²⁰ Post-Soviet women's magazines incorporated more representation of women in art and fashion, compared to the Soviet era, where the representation of women was strongly tied to social roles and political ideology. It is noteworthy that this change in media representation began with the reforms accompanying perestroika in the late Soviet period.

¹¹⁹ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 179-180.

¹²⁰ Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, 181.

Since the early Soviet period, women's magazines played a significant role in "enlightening" women, but perestroika marked a crucial turning point in their modes of representation. Until then, these magazines actively featured topics such as professional life, politics, and social issues, reflecting their socio-political character and the communist ideology. However, with the incorporation of new values introduced by perestroika, both the content and the representations of women began to shift. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this trend became even more pronounced, with apolitical topics such as beauty and culture becoming dominant in these publications. Thus, perestroika marked a critical shift in which women's magazines began to depict a Western-oriented, consumer-driven image of women, alongside the communist ideal of womanhood.

Methodology

Based on the historical context that existing studies have revealed, this study analyses articles regarding Kazakh women and women in Kazakhstan that were published in the periodicals, including women's magazines. This study aims to investigate the impact of perestroika on women's roles, lifestyles, and the representation in the Soviet print media. As a research strategy, this study extracts articles related to Kazakh women and women in Kazakhstan from publications issued between 1985 and 1991, categorises their topics, and examines the content of each article to investigate the impact of perestroika on women. For articles that included illustrations or photographs, the study analyses the visual representation. This study categorises the main topics of the articles into four themes: "conservatism and religion," "ethnic consciousness," "labour," and "beauty standards." A total of nine articles corresponding to these categories were extracted for analysis. Although a limitation of this study is that some of the

articles do not focus on indigenous Kazakh women, it remains meaningful to examine how women from diverse backgrounds experienced perestroika in Kazakhstan.

The sources analysed in this study include three monthly women's magazines:

Krestyanka, *Rabotnitsa*,¹²¹ and *Soviet Woman*, one weekly media digest: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*,¹²² and one archive collection: *Soviet Red Archives*. It should be noted that, due to the author's limitations in language proficiency, this study examines exclusively Russian and English-language periodicals, excluding those published in Kazakh. In addition, all the periodicals analysed in this study are Soviet state-sponsored publications; private publications that began to emerge during the final years of the Soviet Union are not included. Although this research focuses on the perestroika period, when the media became liberalised compared to other periods in the Soviet Union, the periodicals may still reflect some aspects of Soviet ideology.

Soviet Woman was published from 1945 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. East View describes that it began as a bimonthly illustrated magazine tasked with countering anti-Soviet propaganda by introducing Western audiences to the lifestyles of Soviet women. Originally published simultaneously in Russian, English, German and French, the magazine went on to add more foreign language editions.¹²³

The *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* has been published since 1949 and has been renamed twice, to the *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* and the *Current Digest of the*

¹²¹ *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka* were accessed via the list of sources available on the website of The State Public Historical Library of Russia, accessed May 21, 2025, https://www.shpl.ru/readers/helpful_links/internet-resursy_po_periodicheskoi_pechati_zhurnaly_zhurnaly_sovetskogo_perioda_s_1917_po_1991_gg/. However, the following issues of *Rabotnitsa* were not accessible: February, April, May 1985, November 1986, September of 1987, July and December 1988, all months of 1989, and January, July to October and December 1990. Similarly, for *Krestyanka*, the following issues were not available for analysis: January to May, August, and October 1985, September 1986, January, March to May, November 1987, January and April 1989, and December 1991.

¹²² *Soviet Woman* and the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* were obtained from the Global Press Archive of the East View: <https://www.eastview.com/resources/gpa/>, accessed May 21, 2025.

¹²³ "Soviet Woman Digital Archive," East View, accessed May 25, 2025, <https://www.eastview.com/resources/journals/soviet-woman/>.

Russian Press after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Historically, The *Current Digest* selected and translated content on relevant issues from the most authoritative Soviet and Russian newspapers. Intended for use in teaching and research, the translations are presented as documentary materials without elaboration or commentary and state the opinions and views of the original authors, not the publishers of the journal.¹²⁴

The *Soviet Red Archives* is a collection in the Record of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute held by the OSA. The OSA states that the *Soviet Red Archives* was established by Radio Liberty in 1953 for the purpose of extracting reliable and accurate data from the massive body of media produced in the Soviet republics. The primary sources for the *Soviet Red Archives* were Soviet periodicals available abroad; a wide range of Soviet magazines and various scientific journals; transcripts and informational summaries gathered from monitoring Soviet radio and television; and Soviet news agency releases. In addition, Western publications and Radio Liberty materials were also collected and filed with the other materials.¹²⁵ Although the *Soviet Red Archives* contain a variety of materials, this study focuses on those published in Soviet state-sponsored periodicals.

Reemerging Conservatism and Religion

This section examines the revival of traditional gender norms in Kazakhstan, as well as the expansion of Islam and the role of Kazakh women in the process during the perestroika period. During this period, glasnost prompted Kazakhs to discuss traditional and religious values. As mentioned in the first chapter, Kazakhs lived according to nomadic traditions in pre-Soviet

¹²⁴ “The Current Digest of the Russian Press Digital Archive,” East View, accessed May 25, 2025, <https://www.eastview.com/resources/journals/current-digest-russian-press/>.

¹²⁵ “HU OSA 300-80 Soviet Red Archives,” Blinken OSA Archivum, accessed May 21, 2025, <https://catalog.archivum.org/catalog/jDen72LL?tab=context>.

period, where nomadic customary laws defined gender norms in all aspects of life. Particularly, nomadic customs related to marriage, including bride price, polygamy, and amengerism, were distinctive features of the Kazakhs. On the other hand, in southern Kazakhstan, Islam had a stronger presence compared to other regions. Periodicals published during the perestroika period suggest an increased debate over such traditional and religious norms.

Several media articles, including those from women's magazines published between 1985 and 1991, suggest that discussions about such traditional gender norms were becoming gradually more pronounced. One example is the article titled “Не пора ли вводит многоженство?” (Isn't It Time to Introduce Polygamy?) published in *Pravda* on October 14, 1991. This article was written by Altynshash Dzhaganova, a playwright and chairperson of the Committee on Women's Affairs, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh SSR. She notes that the voices were often heard about introducing polygamy in Kazakhstan, and she criticises such claims by referring to them as “the hunters for new brides.” According to the article, the viewpoint that supported the introduction of polygamy prevented them from seeing the real situation of women in Kazakhstan.¹²⁶

Dzhaganova points out several issues concerning women in Kazakhstan at the time. First, many women were working in poor conditions. Half of the population employed in the national economy of Kazakhstan were women, and 66 percent of them worked in the sphere of material production. Working in such an industry was physically demanding and often hazardous. More than 140 thousand women worked the night shift, and over 200 women died in work-related accidents in just two years. Moreover, the average monthly salary of women with equal labour with men was a third lower. Dzhaganova also indicates that rural women faced even harsher

¹²⁶ Altynshash Dzhaganova, “Не пора ли вводить многоженство?” (Isn't It Time to Introduce Polygamy?), *Pravda*, October 14, 1991.

conditions. They had poor living standards, lacked adequate transport infrastructure, and had no gas or electricity. In addition, maternal and child health programs often existed only on paper. In many areas, the quality of medical care was poor, leading to high infant mortality rates.

Furthermore, the number of divorces in Kazakhstan reached 45,000 to 46,000 per year, and thousands of children end up in orphanages despite having living parents.¹²⁷

Based on these circumstances, Dzhaganova demanded for ensuring real social security in all spheres of life, including public, labour, and family, instead of supporting the introduction of polygamy. She insists that the best way out of this situation was to develop a single law on women's rights, protection of the family, motherhood and childhood.¹²⁸ Interestingly, she places emphasis on protecting women from the burden of work, rather than promoting women's labour by achieving gender equality in paid work. That is, she insisted that the first thing she would include in this law is the right of women to work a flexible schedule, with a reduced working day and working week.

This article demonstrates that the gender norms in Kazakhstan were becoming more conservative during the perestroika period in two ways. First, although Dzhaganova herself criticises demands to legalise polygamy, it suggests that traditional forms of marriage were gaining some support in Kazakhstan at the time. As mentioned above, polygamy was legally banned in Kazakhstan in 1920. Yet, the introduction of polygamy was openly discussed at the end of the Soviet Union, because it became easier to express patriarchal values as speech was liberalised through glasnost.

Second, Dzhaganova focuses on the protection of female workers, such as shorter working hours, compared to classical Soviet propaganda that idealises women engaging in wage

¹²⁷ Dzhaganova.

¹²⁸ Dzhaganova.

labour on an equal basis with men. Although she is critical of the introduction of polygamy, she calls for the creation of a flexible work environment for women. As the later section will examine, protecting women from harsh working conditions remained an urgent issue even in late Soviet Kazakhstan. Yet, it is crucial to note that Dzaganova's intention is to protect women from the burdens of work rather than to promote their participation in wage labour. As the second chapter has explored, the introduction of a market economy tended to exclude women from productive labour and stimulate them to focus on reproductive labour at home. In other words, this article suggests that a debate about patriarchal and capitalist gender roles was gradually emerging during perestroika Kazakhstan.

Some other articles show the expansion of Islam in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period and the involvement of women in this trend. As investigated in the first chapter, in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan, many Kazakhs lived according to nomadic customary law such as *adat*, rather than normative Islamic principles. As a result, Kazakh women were relatively freer compared to women from cultures shaped by normative Islam. However, southern Kazakhstan is geographically close to Uzbekistan, where Islam had a stronger presence. For example, Shymkent, Kazakhstan's third-largest city, is located very near to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Therefore, while Islam was not traditionally dominant in many parts of Kazakhstan, Kazakhs in the southern regions had embraced Islamic culture prior to the Soviet period and began to witness an Islamic revival during the perestroika period.

A *TASS* article "Rasprostranenie islama v Kazakhstane" (The Spread of Islam in Kazakhstan) by Arkadiy Rotmistrovskiy, published on August 8, 1991, reported on the rapid expansion of Islam in Kazakhstan at the time. According to this article, the number of Muslim communities in Kazakhstan had increased fivefold over the past five years. In the article, Ratbek

Nysanbaev, Chief Mufti of the Religious Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan, said such growth was a direct result of the democratisation of social life, freedom of religion and religious organisations, and the union of the law adopted by the Soviet parliament. Moreover, this article concludes by stating that various public associations of Islamic faith emerged, for example, the League of Muslim Women.¹²⁹

Meanwhile, this article does not go into the specific role of women, including the League of Muslim Women, in the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan during this period. According to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan of Pavlodar Oblast, which provides descriptions about ethnocultural associations, the objectives of the League's establishment are revival and propagation of customs and traditions of Kazakh people, study of language, history, culture, and education of Kazakh patriotism.¹³⁰ In other words, the objectives of their establishment strongly reflect Kazakh nationalism and patriotism. The fact that this organisation was established in 1991, at the end of the Soviet Union, indicates that ethnic and religious identities were expanding in Kazakhstan during perestroika, and a considerable number of women actively participated in this process.

The two articles analysed here each suggest that traditional and religious norms were beginning to gain momentum in late Soviet Kazakhstan and that these developments were closely linked to women. The first article, while critical of the introduction of polygamy, confirms that Kazakhs had begun to openly discuss patriarchal customs such as polygamy during the Soviet era. The second article points to the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan and reports the

¹²⁹ Arkadi Rotmistrovskiy, "Распространение ислама в Казахстане" (The Spread of Islam in Kazakhstan), *TASS*, August 8, 1991.

¹³⁰ Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan of Pavlodar Oblast, "Павлодарский филиал общественного объединения 'Лига женщин-мусульманок Казахстана'" (Pavlodar Branch of the Public Association 'League of Muslim Women'), accessed May 21, 2025, <https://www.ankpvl.kz/etno/liga-zhenshchin-musulmanok-kazakhstana>.

establishment of a Muslim women's organisation within this trend. Therefore, paradoxically, the liberalisation of speech and religious freedom brought about by perestroika and glasnost became a gateway for the reintroduction of more traditional and conservative gender norms into Kazakh society.

The Rise and Regulation of Ethnic Consciousness

This section examines that periodicals during the perestroika period increasingly emphasised ethnic identity among Kazakh society, while at the same time, some articles were published to counter the growing sense of national consciousness in Kazakhstan. While the previous section discussed the growing influence of traditional and religious values during this time, it also became evident that similar circumstances also promoted the rise of ethnic and national awareness among Kazakhs.

The article titled “Party Life—Press Survey: The Price of Self-Admiration,” published in *Pravda* on February 11, 1987, criticises the nationalist tendencies of periodicals in Kazakhstan, referring to them as “self-admiration.” The author is listed as T. Yesilbayev, who is presumed to be Tleuzhan Yesilbayev, a Kazakh journalist. According to an article by Tatyana Aladina published in *Novaya Gazeta Kazakhstan* on September 12, 2018, he served as a correspondent for *Pravda* during the Soviet era, yet the article does not provide details about the tone of his reporting.¹³¹ The article by Elaman Turysbekov, published by *Kazinform* on October 31, 2020,

¹³¹ Tatyana Aladina, “Действительными членами Академии журналистики Казахстана стали генеральный директор газеты «Экспресс К» (ЭК) Адильхан Нусупов и руководитель корпункта «ЭК» в Алма-Ате Тлеужан Есильбаев» (Adylkhan Nusupov, General Director of the Newspaper Express K (EK), and Tleuzhan Yesilbayev, Head of the EK Bureau in Almaty, became full members of the Academy of Journalism of Kazakhstan), *Novaya Gazeta Kazakhstan*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.novgaz.com/index.php/about/2-news/2143-%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE-%D0%B4%D0%BE-%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82>.

notes that Yesilbayev held positions as first deputy director of *KazTAG*, deputy editor-in-chief, and editor-in-chief of *Kazinform*.¹³²

In the article, Yesilbayev analyses articles published in Kazakh newspapers and magazines in 1986, criticising them for highlighting nationalism while lacking perspectives on interethnic cooperation and an internationalist upbringing. He first points out that “newspapers and magazines often confined themselves to jingoistic slogans and reported in buoyant tones on the successes of the republic and its provinces.” He also insists that “articles using specific examples to show the sources and results of friendship among peoples and disclosing the importance of fraternal cooperation and mutual assistance for the fate of the Kazakh people appeared only sporadically.” On the other hand, “materials dealing with the deepening and broadening of economic ties, as well as with socialist competition among the fraternal republics, completely disappeared from newspaper pages.”¹³³

It is crucial to note that he also criticises magazines published in Kazakhstan, including women’s magazines, for reinforcing national exclusivity. He argues that many newspapers and magazines published in Kazakh language, in particular *Qazaqstan Aielderi*, *Madeniyet Zhane Turmys* (Culture and Everyday Life), and *Ontustik Kazakhstan*, include only Kazakh names and photographs that show representatives of the indigenous nationality. He criticises such tendency in these articles by saying “such an erroneous position leads to the artificial reinforcement of national exclusiveness.” In addition, he condemns the magazine of the Kazakhstan Writers’

¹³² Elaman Turysbekov, “100-летие Казинформа: заглянуть в будущее, чтобы вспомнить о прошлом” (Kazinform's 100th Anniversary: Looking into the Future to Remember the Past), *Kazinform*, October 31, 2020, https://www.inform.kz/ru/100-letie-kazinforma-zaglyanut-v-budushee-htoby-vspomnit-o-proshlom_a3713134.

¹³³ Tleuzhan Yesilbayev, “Party Life – Press Survey: The Price of Self-Admiration,” *Pravda*, February 11, 1987.

Union, *Zhulduz* (Star), for very rarely acquainting Kazakh readers with the works of Russian writers or of writers of other nations.¹³⁴

In the following paragraphs, Yesilbayev discusses specific magazines and topics, criticising the ethnic dimension of Kazakh periodicals. He refers to articles in *Vechernyaya Alma-Ata* (Evening Alma-Ata), *Sotsialistik Kazakhstan* (Socialist Kazakhstan), and *Leninshil Zhas* (Leninist Youth), denouncing their enthusiastic reporting on the opening of kindergartens where all instruction and upbringing is conducted in Kazakh. He argues that these articles propagandise national egoism, and it would make much more sense to set up Kazakh-language groups where children of different nationalities could live and be educated not in isolation from one another but in the same schools and kindergartens.¹³⁵

Additionally, he criticises an article from the newspaper *Kazakh Adebieti* (Kazakh Literature) and the magazine *Bilim Zhane Yembek* (Knowledge and Labour), for not conducive to instilling a spirit of internationalism in people. These articles report that the proportion of the indigenous population in Kazakhstan will reach 50% by 2000, whereas it was only 29% in 1962. They also predict that in the future, because of a low birthrate and a drop-off in migration, the growth rate of the population originating in the European USSR will no longer be what it once was, while the proportion of Kazakhs in the republic will be 65% to 70%. Notably, he concludes the article by stating that “the December events in Alma-Ata brought to light major shortcomings in the work of Kazakhstan’s ideological personnel, including press employees,”¹³⁶ which makes it evident that he wrote the article with consideration of the Zheltoqsan Protest in the previous year.

¹³⁴ Yesilbayev.

¹³⁵ Yesilbayev.

¹³⁶ Yesilbayev.

The article suggests two main significant points. First, it highlights the fact that many Kazakh periodicals at the time actively featured Kazakhs and reported positively on rising ethnic consciousness by referring to Kazakh-language education and the growth of the Kazakh population. The liberalisation of speech during the perestroika period further supported this trend, as many Kazakh periodicals included articles emphasising the importance of preserving and developing the Kazakh language, history, and culture. Although Yesilbayev criticises this tendency, it is understandable that Kazakh newspapers and magazines would seek to protect Kazakh national identity, considering the greater emphasis on the Russian language and Slavic culture compared to those of Kazakhstan, and the fact that the Soviet central media placed significant attention on Slavs, particularly Russians throughout the Soviet era.

The second point is that Yesilbayev criticises the ethnic consciousness in Kazakh print media in response to the Zheltoqsan Protest. During the perestroika period, nationalist movements were gaining momentum in several Soviet republics, including Kazakhstan. In response to this situation, central Soviet periodicals published many articles denouncing such movements and the promotion of national languages and cultures, while instead emphasising Soviet ethnic diversity and the importance of interethnic cooperation. These articles were underpinned by an intention to suppress the rise of national consciousness in the republics, while maintaining a sense of Soviet civic identity and the cultural dominance of the Russian-centred Slavic core. In this context, although Yesilbayev claims that Kazakh newspapers and magazines failed to promote values such as internationalist upbringing, friendship among peoples, and fraternal cooperation, it is crucial to recognise that his article can be read as an attempt to restrain nationalist tendencies in Kazakhstan and to uphold Russian centrism.



Figure 1. *Soviet Woman*, “‘Soviet Perestroika’ in the USA,” January 31, 1990.

The growing sense of national identity in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period can also be visually observed in the pages of women's magazines. The January 1990 issue of *Soviet Woman* features an article by Valentin Kozitsyn titled "'Soviet Perestroika' in the USA" (Figure 1), which reported on the Soviet mobile exhibition "The USSR: Perestroika" that had been taking place in the United States since December 1989. More than fifty people from the Soviet Union travelled to the U.S. for the exhibition, and the article states that this exhibition "testifies to the fact that the new way of thinking is gaining strength in our relations and the old stereotypes are disappearing." The main sections of the exposition were: perestroika in the political contacts between the USSR and the West, primarily the USA; reforms in the socio-political and economic life in the country; prospects for further development of economic

contacts between the USSR and the USA; new approaches towards solution of ecological problems and international cooperation in this sphere.¹³⁷

Although the text of the article does not directly refer to Kazakhstan, the pages are adorned with the photographs showcasing Kazakh landmarks, culture, and people. The top photograph features Republic Square in Alma-Ata, while the one on the far right shows the Medeu skating rink in the outskirts of Alma-Ata. The bottom-left image depicts a traditional meal setting inside a yurt. One limitation of this analysis is that it does not include a comparison with issues from the pre-perestroika Soviet period. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that the representations of Kazakh ethnic customs and culture appeared in women's magazines during the perestroika.

This section has examined the rise of ethnic consciousness in Kazakhstan from the late 1980s and how this trend was reflected in articles, particularly in Kazakh periodicals. As the second article clearly illustrates, even women's magazines featured visual images that represented Kazakh culture. At the same time, however, the central Soviet media countered such ethnic discourse by frequently emphasising the ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union, with the aim of preserving Russian centrism. Although the first article was written by a Kazakh journalist, he criticised the nationalism represented in Kazakh media. Perestroika was introduced with the aim of developing the country through internal reforms, but the unified Soviet identity, which was based on a Russian-centred vision, was ultimately destabilised.

¹³⁷ "'Soviet Perestroika' in the USA," *Soviet Woman*, January 31, 1990, 2.

The Roles of Women in Labour

This section examines the representation of women in the labour force in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period. As shown in the first chapter, Soviet women were expected to engage in productive labour equally with men, while at the same time fulfilling reproductive roles such as childbearing and housework. Even during the perestroika era, Soviet periodicals continued, to some extent, to present idealised portrayals of women who were willing to take on social roles. At the same time, the liberalisation of speech and the introduction of a market economy brought new values concerning women's roles. Consequently, alongside the Soviet ideal of women engaged in productive labour and Party activities, a new image emerged that emphasised women's commitment to family life while remaining in the workforce. Moreover, the working conditions of Kazakh women were far from ideal, and their improvement continued to be a significant concern.

The article here is an interview with photographs entitled “Sproshu ne tol’ko o zdorov’e” (I Will Ask Not Only About Health) published in the May 1986 issue of *Krestyanka* (Figure 2). This article is an interview with Alma Bergenova, a doctor in Maksimov District, Kazakhstan, and a delegate to the 27th Congress of the CPSU. It begins with Bergenova's description of the current state of medical care in Maksimov District and her enthusiasm for her work. In the following paragraphs, she quotes Gorbachev's speech on the necessity to meet the medical needs of the population and raises the issue of the shortage of doctors and equipment in the hospitals of the district, which results in the burden on doctors and poor quality of medical services. Bergenova also emphasises the importance of providing medical services to children. Furthermore, she points out that funds are needed to solve these problems in rural medical care,

my colleagues.”¹³⁹ In other words, the article emphasises that she is active in both productive work and Party activities, which matches the image of a typical Soviet woman active in the public sphere.

The three photographs in this article also follow the pattern of Soviet female representation. The first photograph shows Bergenova examining a child, and the caption reads, “Children feel a kind person.” This photograph shows Bergenova in her role as a professional doctor, but additionally, it can also be interpreted as emphasising her motherhood and presenting her as a figure skilled in caring for children. The second photograph shows Beregenova communicating with other delegates of the Tselinograd Region, showing her working in the Party in addition to her medical work. In the third individual photo, Bergenova is wearing work clothes and has a serious facial expression.

Perhaps because the article was published in 1986, relatively early in the perestroika period, the photographs strongly reflect typical representation of Soviet women. This article on Bereganova and the state of rural health care shows that some publications during perestroika reproduced the image of Kazakh women as typical Soviet women who took on active roles in the public domain. In the article, Bereganova is presented as a local doctor and a delegate to the Party Congress, which played important social and political roles. Such articles idealised to readers the responsible roles of women outside the home.

On the other hand, however, in the later period of perestroika, women’s magazines also began to reflect the introduction of the market economy and the growing importance of women’s roles within the family. The *Soviet Woman* article titled “ROMBOM and Others,” published in January 1991 (Figure 3), introduced the lives of three women living in Kazakhstan. It should be

¹³⁹ “Спрошу не только о здоровье” (I Will Ask Not Only About Health), 21.

noted that all of the women appear to be of Russian descent, based on their names, the photographs, and the content of the article.



Figure 3. *Soviet Woman*, “Rombom and Others,” January 31, 1990.

First, the article introduces a cooperative named “Rombom,” located in the town of Shakhtinsk in central Kazakhstan. According to the article, Rombom is the name of a gnome who likes to give presents from a Northern folk tale. They named their cooperative after him because it was founded to produce, sell and donate affordable clothing for children. Rombom is made up of 7 young mothers, including Marina Vasiliyeva, the head of the cooperative. Vasiliyeva says that the Town Komsomol Committee has been helping them since its establishment. She also states that they make 150 to 200 rubles a month, which is not much, but they do not work more than 4 hours a day. The article notes that “their work in the cooperative is not just a means of making some money on top of the children’s allowance they get from the

state, but an opportunity to use their abilities.” Moreover, Vasiliyeva tells the reporter that in Shakhtinsk many women had followed them, since it is a mining town and it is hard to get a job for women.¹⁴⁰

This part of the article provides insight into women’s participation in cooperatives and their working styles in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period. As discussed in the second chapter, cooperatives played a role in mitigating shortages of goods, and Rombom also contributed to addressing the shortage of children’s clothing. On the other hand, previous studies have pointed out that the spread of cooperatives in Kazakhstan was slower than in other republics, and that cooperatives were often made scapegoats for various social problems at the time. However, in the case of Rombom, the cooperative received support from the Town Komsomol Committee, and it appears that they did not face particularly serious difficulties. Focusing on the way these women worked, it is evident that they worked less than four hours a day, allowing them to demonstrate their skills in the workplace while also prioritising their roles as mothers at home by limiting their working hours.

The second woman featured in the article is Nelya Shakhvorostova, who lives in a village near Kopchagai,¹⁴¹ not far from Alma-Ata. She lives with her family and relatives – 13 people in total – and they run a livestock farm. Shakhvorostova is a registered nurse who worked for 18 years at a rural hospital, and her husband is a mechanical engineer. Although neither of them originally came from a farming background, they have learned about agriculture through some practical experience on a farm, books, and advice from specialists.¹⁴² Her ability to balance her work as a nurse while engaging in livestock farming with her family reflects the image of the

¹⁴⁰ “Rombom and Others,” *Soviet Woman*, January 31, 1990, 60.

¹⁴¹ Kopchagai was renamed and is now Qonayev.

¹⁴² “Rombom and Others,” 61.

typical Soviet woman who actively participates in productive labour. However, the fact that she lives in an extended family setting may also suggest a positive portrayal of high birth rates and large families – especially when considered against the backdrop of declining birth rates among Slavic women during that period.

The third woman in the article is Nadezhda Lushnikova in Alma-Ata. She has lived among the Kazakhs for a long time and has studied their language and culture. The article emphasises that although she is a Russian woman, she is known as an *akyn*, who has long been respected in society and is usually a man. Lushnikova is the director of the local museum and has formed a cooperative of several elderly women who are experts in the national needlework.¹⁴³ Founding a cooperative is a point she has in common with Vasiliyeva. In other words, the article indicates that the wave of economic reform during perestroika had, to some extent, reached women living in Kazakhstan.

In addition, the article highlights that Lushnikova is a Russian woman coexisting within Kazakh society. Indeed, it appears that she respected and sought to promote the Kazakh language and culture. However, in order to explore the article's description of ethnic topics, it is necessary to consider the broader attitude toward ethnicity and nationality in Soviet media at the time. As examined above, Soviet central publications during the perestroika period suggested an intention to suppress nationalist movements, including the Zheltoqsan Protest in Kazakhstan. At the same time, they often published articles that emphasised the ethnic diversity and the importance of coexistence among different nationalities in the Soviet Union. The description of Lushnikova may also reflect, to some extent, the intentions underpinning such periodicals.

¹⁴³ "Rombom and Others," 62.

The article concludes by stating that “They have all put their trust in the perestroika and have managed to take a new look at themselves and their potential. What do they have in common? Every woman wants to work and do her bit for the family and at the same time wants to be close to the home. They are all beauty-conscious and strive after financial security and order.”¹⁴⁴ These statements suggest that perestroika introduced new values concerning women’s roles. As clearly exemplified by Vasiliyeva’s case, the role of women during this period appears to have extended beyond wage labour to include a renewed emphasis on staying close to home. In addition, although the article itself does not delve deeply into this point, the reference to women’s concern with beauty implies that new beauty standards were beginning to influence Kazakhstan as well. This aspect will be explored in the next section.

Needless to say, *Soviet Woman*, the magazine in which this article appeared, was a Soviet state-sponsored publication, and it is presumably that its content reflects government views to a significant extent. At the same time, however, the increased freedom of speech brought about by glasnost created an environment in which printed media could begin to incorporate values beyond official Soviet gender norms – such as those emphasizing women’s domestic roles or associating women with beauty. The case of “ROMBOM and Others” can also be interpreted as an example of how, under perestroika, capitalist and patriarchal gender roles embodied in the figure of the beauty-conscious woman fulfilling her role at home began to emerge in the magazine’s content. Furthermore, the fact that two of the women featured in the article established cooperatives suggests that the economic reforms of perestroika allowed women in Kazakhstan to participate in the workforce in ways that reflected elements of a market economy.

¹⁴⁴ “Rombom and Others,” 62.

Meanwhile, this article indicates that during the perestroika period, newly emerging gender norms coexisted with the representations of the typical Soviet woman. For instance, the image of a woman actively engaged in productive labour, such as Shakhvorostova, the second woman featured in the article, continued to appear to some extent in women's magazines. In other words, the print media during perestroika simultaneously portrayed both the conventional ideal of women who fulfilled duties in both the productive and reproductive sphere and took on social and political roles, and an alternative type of woman who valued her connection to the family and took care of her appearance. However, it is important to note that the article does not mention Kazakh women or other Turkic women in Kazakhstan.

Lastly, even in the last years of the Soviet Union, working conditions for women in Kazakhstan were poor, and women were at a significant disadvantage compared to men in wage labour. For instance, in the *Pravda* article analysed above, Dzhaganova pointed out that many women were working in harsh conditions, and a significant number of women have died in workplace accidents. She also noted that the average salary for women was only two-thirds that of men. In addition, as discussed in the second chapter, indigenous Turkic women tended to engage in lower-skilled labour than their Slavic counterparts in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan.

The article titled “Provision of Services for Kazakh Working Women” published in *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* on September 27, 1985 reported that the Permanent Commission on Maternity, Child Development and the Work and Life of Women examined the matter of the work of the Kazakh SSR Ministry of Food Industry in raising the production and social activities of working women and the creation for them of the proper conditions of labour, life and recreation. According to the article, the speakers noted that the low level of the qualifications of

women workers often impedes the growth of the effectiveness and quality of work. The article states that the proportion of women engaged in manual work is high. In addition, many enterprises lack healthy and safe working conditions, and the state of sanitation and hygiene does not meet existing norms. The protection and improvement of the health of women workers was also unsatisfactory, especially as regards mothers with children.¹⁴⁵ This article thus illustrates that many Kazakh women were engaged in low-skilled labour even in the late 1980s, and that workplace health, safety, and sanitary conditions for these women had become major social issues.

This section has clarified that periodicals including women's magazines during the perestroika period continued to maintain the image of the typical Soviet woman who was active in productive labour and Party activities, while at the same time showing that some women began to choose different ways of working. As the second article demonstrates, with the introduction of the market economy, some Russian women in Kazakhstan began to engage in cooperative enterprises. They also started to place greater importance not only on productive labour but also on reproductive labour within the home. Meanwhile, even in the late Soviet period, Kazakh women continued to be overrepresented in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, and improving their working conditions remained a significant topic of discussion. Overall, the representations in the print media during the perestroika era were in a transitional phase, in which typical Soviet gender roles coexisted with emerging new gender norms.

¹⁴⁵ "Provision of Services for Kazakh Working Women," *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, September 27, 1985.

Emergence of New Beauty Standards

This section explores the emergence of new beauty concepts related to Kazakh women in Soviet periodicals. From the late 1980s, beauty contests were introduced in the Soviet Union with the intention of incorporating Western cultural elements. Along with them, new beauty concepts that emphasised women's physical appearance began to spread throughout the Soviet Union. These Western-imported beauty standards sometimes clashed with Soviet images of women, and in a society where women were typically represented through their social roles, they were perceived as something novel. Women in Kazakhstan also began participating in beauty contests, both domestically and internationally.

The article titled “Bravo, Saltanat!” written by Yuriy Sagaydak in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on November 23, 1988 (Figure 4), and the article ““Miss Aziya’ iz Alma-Aty” (‘Miss Asia’ from Alma-Ata) by N. Kishchik in *Izvestia* on the same day (Figure 5), reported that Saltanat Kamaliev from Alma-Ata was awarded the second place as “Miss Asia” at the Miss Asia contest held in London. Sagaydak mentions that Kamaliev works in a local fashion house and this is where she was found by representatives of the Social Inventions Fund of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, who rushed to search for beauties in the Central Asian republics after receiving an invitation from the organisers of the London competition.¹⁴⁶ In the article by Kishchik, Kamaliev says that all expenses were covered by this fund. Together with her, two other women from Tashkent, one from Dushanbe and one from Frunze¹⁴⁷ participated in the contest.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Yuriy Sagaydak, “Браво, Салтанат!” (Bravo, Saltanat!), *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, November 23, 1988.

¹⁴⁷ Frunze, now Bishkek, is the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁴⁸ N. Kishchik, “«Мисс Азия» из Алма-Аты” (“Miss Asia” from Alma-Ata). *Izvestia*, November 23, 1988.



Figure 4. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, “Bravo, Saltanat!,” November 23, 1988.



Figure 5. *Izvestia*, “‘Miss Aziya’ iz Alma-Aty,” November 23, 1988.

Sagaydak notes that if he was a judge, he would have given a crown to all five, since they are slender, beautiful, graceful in their movements, with sweet smiles. He emphasises that the competition was quite demanding. Each participant was asked to appear in front of the judges three times: in a national costume, everyday clothes, and in a gown prepared by English fashion designers. After that, they selected the seven contestants, including Kamalievna. They were required to answer a series of questions, sometimes the most unexpected. And finally, the judges awarded Kamalievna the second place, giving her a silver crown and conferring the title of “Miss Asia.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Sagaydak.

Sagaydak quotes Kamalievna saying, “when I flew to London, I was very nervous. Firstly, I had never participated in beauty contests. Secondly, I had never been abroad. Thirdly, I do not know English.”¹⁵⁰ This suggests that the contest was a completely new experience for her and culturally challenging. Yet, she states, “it is necessary to participate in such competitions, because you can look into the world of peers from very different countries, try to understand how they live, what they dream about, what worries them.” She also says, “we are very glad that Soviet girls were able to take part in the competition. Regardless of its formal results, it produced a huge result: the English public, mostly poorly versed in what lies behind the two words ‘Soviet Union,’ learned about your union republics of Central Asia, saw the most beautiful girls who live there, and became acquainted with their culture.”¹⁵¹

In Kishchik’s article, Kamalievna talks about her career and family. She says, “I will work in the fashion theatre, I love my profession very much. I will continue my studies at the correspondence pedagogical institute. At home, my father is waiting for me, he works as a sound engineer at the republican television centre, my mother – she works in railway transport. Three sisters. And although I parted with them for a short time, I really missed them. And actually, I am not a queen at all, but a simple Alma-Ata girl who was very lucky...”¹⁵²

These articles imply two pivotal points on Kazakh women in beauty contests. First, these articles use different representations of women than they did before the late 1980s. To illustrate, Sagaydak describes the contestants from Central Asia as “slender, beautiful, graceful in their movements, with sweet smiles,” judging them based on their appearance. This reflects a clearly sexist and lookist set of values in contrast to the pre-perestroika Soviet Union, where women's

¹⁵⁰ Sagaydak.

¹⁵¹ Sagaydak.

¹⁵² Kishchik.

social roles were considered important. Additionally, both articles feature large photographs of Kamaliev, in which she is dressed in a glamorous outfit and wears striking makeup. These images present a marked contrast to the photograph of Bergenova featured in the article “Sproshu ne tol’ko o zdorov’e” analysed above. Second, although beauty contests applied a value system that judged women by their physical beauty to Kazakh women, the contests also functioned as a way for the contestants to connect with the international community. In these articles, Kamaliev states that

In these articles, Kamaliev emphasises the significance of the participation of Soviet girls in beauty contests. She herself had never taken part in such contests before, nor had she ever travelled abroad. However, the trip to London marked her first experience of stepping outside the Soviet Union, offering her the chance to interact with people from various regions and to learn about different cultures and societies. Moreover, she points out that the Miss Asia competition served as an opportunity for audiences to gain a better understanding of the Soviet Union and the Central Asian republics. Hence, although the introduction of beauty contests in the Soviet Union brought relatively patriarchal Western values into Kazakhstan, it also functioned as a means for girls to engage with societies beyond their own.

This section has investigated the case of the 1988 Miss Asia contest to explore alternative beauty concepts introduced during perestroika and their implications for Kazakh women. Perestroika and glasnost brought in cultural influences from the West, which often embraced more patriarchal values in contrast to the communist bloc. As a result, a value system that judged women based on their physical appearance began to affect Kazakh women as well, including figures like Kamaliev. Both articles analysed above highlight her physical beauty through their content and photographs. At the same time, as Kamaliev herself emphasises, it is pivotal to note

that beauty contests also served as a means to connect with the international community for some Kazakh girls.

This chapter has shed light on how articles published during the perestroika period in women's magazines, newspapers, and by state news agencies began to reflect values that had previously been uncommon in the Soviet Union. The liberalisation of speech brought about by glasnost enabled a resurgence of Kazakh ethnic consciousness and Islamic momentum, while also encouraging shifts in women's roles in the workforce and introducing Western beauty concepts. At the same time, this period was a cultural and social transition, when typical Soviet women's roles coexisted with emerging new gender norms. Overall, from a gender perspective, the reforms of perestroika gave rise to a more conservative and patriarchal gender order in Kazakhstan but did not completely displace preexisting ideals. Instead, plural and sometimes conflicting principles coexisted. Through the analysis of Soviet periodicals, this chapter has revealed the beginning of transformation of Kazakh society, and the role of women within it as well as the impact on their lives.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how the economic, political, and sociocultural reforms associated with perestroika impacted women's roles and gender politics in Kazakhstan. It has also explored how the liberalisation of speech under glasnost influenced discussions in the public sphere around ethnic consciousness, Islam, and conservative gender norms in Kazakh society. To investigate these topics, the study selected and analysed articles from Soviet state-sponsored women's magazines, newspapers, and news agencies published between 1985 and 1991. Additionally, it provided a historiographical overview of the roles and social status of women in Kazakhstan from the pre-Soviet to the Soviet period, aiming to contextualise the shifts observed during perestroika within a broader historical framework.

As a result, this study revealed that the reforms of perestroika stimulated a rise in ethnic consciousness and an emergence of Islam in Kazakhstan. Women and women's magazines also played an active role in these processes to a certain extent. Moreover, the roles of women in labour began to shift: some women were exhausted from the “double burden” of productive and reproductive labour and started to prioritise their domestic roles. At the same time, the emerging market economy was exclusionary toward women in the sphere of productive labour, although some women began to enter cooperatives, a new form of enterprise. Additionally, while women had typically been represented through their social roles during the Soviet period, new beauty concepts, rooted in consumerism and an emphasis on physical appearance, also began to emerge. However, these changes did not progress rapidly; instead, typical Soviet gender roles and representations of women coexisted alongside their emerging counterparts.

This study focuses on Kazakh women, a group marginalised in terms of ethnicity, region, and gender, thereby contributing to a body of Soviet and perestroika studies that has often

overlooked Kazakhstan. In the context of research on Kazakhstan, studies grounded in gender perspectives remain relatively scarce. Moreover, discussions of sociocultural transformations in Kazakhstan are often framed in a binary between the Soviet period and the post-independence era. Therefore, this study offers insights into the gender norms, ethnic consciousness, and religious discourse in contemporary Kazakhstani society by examining the transitional period of perestroika. It also brings greater diversity and depth to the fields of perestroika and Kazakhstani studies by shedding light on women's experiences during this period.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. First, due to linguistic constraints, the primary sources analysed were limited to Russian and English-language periodicals, excluding important Kazakh-language materials. These Russian and English periodicals contained very few articles specifically focusing on women in Kazakhstan, and the topics covered may have been limited in scope. Furthermore, these sources may have reflected perspectives from the Soviet centre or Russia more than those of Kazakh women themselves. For these reasons, it is pivotal to analyse periodicals published in Kazakh. Additionally, all the sources examined in this study were Soviet state-sponsored publications, meaning that private publications, which increased in number during the perestroika period, could not be included.

Moreover, this study has interpreted the rise of ethnic consciousness and the emergence of Islam in Kazakhstan during the perestroika period primarily as outcomes of glasnost and the accompanying liberalisation of speech. However, it is important to note that Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership did not intend for perestroika to stimulate nationalism among the republics. Although Moscow maintained strong influence over Kazakhstan throughout the Soviet era, ethnic movements had already emerged, particularly among the elite, long before perestroika. As Umbetaliyeva points out, as early as the 1920s, Moscow harboured suspicions that Kazakh

political elites were actively engaged with establishing their own republic independent from Soviet Russia. As a result, only two ethnic Kazakhs, including Konayev, ever held the position of First Secretary of the Kazakh SSR Communist Party. Therefore, future research on the rise of ethnic movements during perestroika may benefit from considering not only the impact of glasnost, but also broader historical and regional contexts.

Lastly, since this study focused exclusively on sources from the perestroika period, it did not provide a comparative analysis of gender norms in Kazakhstan during the pre-perestroika Soviet era or the post-independence period. Nor did it compare how periodicals from different eras represented women in Kazakhstan. These areas remain open for future studies to explore in greater depth. Furthermore, this study was not able to examine in detail the year-by-year differences within the perestroika period, from 1985 to 1991. Taking these limitations into account, comprehensive historical research that focuses on the roles, social status, and representations of women in Kazakhstan is crucial for capturing the multilayered nature of gender history in both the Soviet Union and Central Asia.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Dzhaganova, Altynshash. “Не пора ли вводить многоженство?” (Isn’t It Time to Introduce Polygamy?). *Pravda*, October 14, 1991.
- Kishchik, N. “«Мисс Азия» из Алма-Аты” (“Miss Asia” from Alma-Ata). *Izvestia*, November 23, 1988.
- Kozitsyn, Valentin. “‘Soviet Perestroika’ in the USA.” *Soviet Woman*, January 31, 1990, 2-3.
- Musina, Masha. “Королевские испытания” (The Royal Trials). *Rabotnitsa*, August 1988, 37-38.
- “Provision of Services for Kazakh Working Women.” *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, September 27, 1985.
- “Rombom and Others.” *Soviet Woman*, January 31, 1990, 60-62.
- Rotmistrovskiy, Arkadi. “Распространение ислама в Казахстане” (The Spread of Islam in Kazakhstan). *TASS*, August 8, 1991.
- Sagaydak, Yuriy. “Браво, Салтанат!” (Bravo, Saltanat!). *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, November 23, 1988.
- “Спрошу не только о здоровье” (I Will Ask Not Only About Health). *Krestyanka*, May 1986, 20-21.
- Yesilbayev, Tleuzhan. “Party Life – Press Survey: The Price of Self-Admiration.” *Pravda*, February 11, 1987.

Secondary Literature

- Aladina, Tatyana. “Действительными членами Академии журналистики Казахстана стали генеральный директор газеты «Экспресс К» (ЭК) Адыльхан Нусупов и руководитель корпункта «ЭК» в Алма-Ате Тлеужан Есильбаев” (Adylkhan Nusupov, General Director of the Newspaper *Express K (EK)*, and Tleuzhan Yesilbayev, Head of the *EK* Bureau in Almaty, became full members of the Academy of Journalism of Kazakhstan). *Novaya Gazeta Kazakhstan*, September 12, 2018.
<https://www.novgaz.com/index.php/about/2-news/2143-%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE-%D0%B4%D0%BE-%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82>.
- Asilkhan, Balerke. “‘Бейімбет Майлин редактор болған’: әйел теңдігін ғасырға жуық насихаттаған журнал” (‘Beimbet Maylin Was the Editor’: A Magazine That Promoted Women's Equality for Almost a Century). *Bugin.kz*, April 21, 2024.
<https://bugin.kz/36831-beyimbet-maylin-redaktor-bolghan-ayel-tenhdigin-ghasyrgha-dguyq-nasikhattaghan-d>.
- Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan of Pavlodar Oblast. “Павлодарский филиал общественного объединения ‘Лига женщин-мусульманок Казахстана’” (Pavlodar Branch of the Public Association “League of Muslim Women”). Accessed May 21, 2025.
<https://www.ankpvl.kz/etno/liga-zhenshchin-musulmanok-kazakhstana>.
- Behzadi, Negar Elodie 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): 202-219.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1699777>.
- Blinken OSA Archivum. “HU OSA 300-80 Soviet Red Archives.” Accessed May 21, 2025.
<https://catalog.archivum.org/catalog/jDen72LL?tab=context>.
- Bohlen, Celestine. “Gorbachev’s Reforms Shock One Entrenched Republic.” *Washington Post*, February 21, 1987.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/02/22/gorbachevs-reforms-shock-one-entrenched-republic/9a75497b-0604-4a32-af9c-2d846a7dd735/>.
- Clements, Barbara Evans. “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel.” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (1992): 485-496. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2500056>.
- Dadabaev, Timur. “Evaluations of Perestroika in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Public Views in Contemporary Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 2 (2016): 179-192. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48610426>.
- East View. “Soviet Woman Digital Archive.” Accessed May 25, 2025.
<https://www.eastview.com/resources/journals/soviet-woman/>.
- . “The Current Digest of the Russian Press Digital Archive.” Accessed May 25, 2025.
<https://www.eastview.com/resources/journals/current-digest-russian-press/>.
- Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. “Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-1929.” *Russian Review* 62, no. 1 (2003): 132-149.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3664562>.
- Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Russian Federation. “Туризм” (Tourism). Accessed May 23, 2025.
https://kazembassy.ru/rus/respublika_kazakhstan/interesnoe_o_kazaxstane/turizm/?cid=0&rid=51.
- Gorbachev, Mikhail. *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. Harper & Row, 1987.
- Ilic, Melanie. “Women and Competition in State Socialist Societies: Soviet-era Beauty Contests.” In *Competition in Socialist Society*, edited by Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic. Routledge, 2014. Accepted manuscript (post-print), <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/1258/>.
- Kamp, Marianne. “The Soviet Legacy and Women’s Rights in Central Asia.” *Current History* 115, no. 783 (2016): 270-276. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48614189>.
- Kundakbayeva, Janat. “Early Soviet Modernization in the Lives of Kazakh Women.” *Voices on Central Asia*, October 19, 2022. <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/early-soviet-modernization-in-the-lives-of-kazakh-women/>.
- Lubin, Nancy. “Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions.” *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 2 (1981): 182-203. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/151335>.
- Michaels, Paula A. “Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban.” *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 307-333.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3178760>.
- . *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. “Gender and Restructuring: Perestroika, the 1989 Revolutions, and Women.” *WIDER Working Papers* 87 (1990): 1-43.
<https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/gender-and-restructuring>.
- Morozova, Irina. “On the Causes of Socialism Deconstruction: Elitist Discourses and People’s Perceptions in Contemporary Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.” *Asian Studies*

- Newsletter* 60 (2012): 6-7. <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/causes-socialisms-deconstruction-elitist-discourses-peoples-perceptions>.
- Nakachi, Mie. “「女性に自ら決める権利が与えられるべきだ」：ソ連における戦後の人口増加政策と 1955 年の人工妊娠中絶の再合法化” (“A Woman Should be Given the Right to Decide Herself”: Postwar Soviet Pronatalist Policy and the 1955 Re-legalization of Abortion). *Russian and East European Studies* 50 (2021): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.5823/jarees.2021.1>.
- Pannier, Bruce “Kazakhstan: Zheltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 14, 2006. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1073453.html>.
- Ramsay, Rebekah. “Nomadic Hearths of Soviet Culture: ‘Women’s Red Yurt’ Campaigns in Kazakhstan, 1925–1935.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, no. 10 (2021): 1937-1961. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1940869>.
- Ryskulova, Nargiza. “Жанаозен - город, с которого начались протесты в Казахстане. Что о нем нужно знать” (Zhanaozen – The City Where the Protests in Kazakhstan Began. What You Need to Know About It). *BBC News Russian*, January 6, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-59898698>.
- Sirinyok-Dolgaryova, Katerina. “Transformation of Women’s Representation in Media of Transitional Post-Soviet Society: Study of Women’s Magazines ‘Rabotnitsa’ and ‘Krestyanka’, 1971-2010.” *Zarządzanie Mediami* 2, no. 4 (2014): 169-191. <https://doi.org/10.4467/23540214ZM.14.013.3575>.
- Slider, Darrell. “Embattled Entrepreneurs: Soviet Cooperatives in an Unreformed Economy.” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 5 (1991): 797-821. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/152450>.
- Szálkai, Kinga. “The Soviet Union as a ‘Feminist Colonialist?’ The Women’s Question in Early Soviet Central Asia.” *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2019): 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.14267/cojourn.2019v4n1a2>.
- Turysbekov, Elaman. “100-летие Казинформа: заглянуть в будущее, чтобы вспомнить о прошлом” (Kazinform’s 100th Anniversary: Looking into the Future to Remember the Past). *Kazinform*, October 31, 2020. https://www.inform.kz/ru/100-letie-kazinforma-zaglyanut-v-budushee-chtoby-vspomnit-o-proshlom_a3713134.
- Umbetalieva, Tolganay. “Kazakhstan and Perestroika: Was a Chance at ‘Heroism’ Lost?” *Asian Studies Newsletter* 60 (2012): 14. <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/kazakhstan-perestroika-was-chance-heroism-lost>.
- Uyama, Tomohiko. “20 世紀初頭におけるカザフ知識人の世界観：M. ドゥラトフ『めざめよ、カザフ！』を中心に” (Weltanschauung of the Kazakh Intelligentsia at the Beginning of the 20th Century: An Analysis of Mir-Ya'qub Dulatov's *Awake, Kazakh!*). *Slavic Studies* 44 (1997): 1-36. <http://hdl.handle.net/2115/40161>.
- Vanden Heuvel, Katrina. “Glasnost for Women?” *Nation*, 250, no. 22 (1990): 774-779.
- Werner, Cynthia. “Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (2009): 314-331. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20527710>.