

MUSLIM WOMEN IN CENTRAL ASIA:
THE IMPACT OF SOVIET LEGACY

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ABSTRACT

MUSLIM WOMEN IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE IMPACT OF SOVIET LEGACY

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This thesis analyzes the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia from a historical perspective to understand the impact of the Soviet regime on Muslim women's lifestyles. It specifically focuses on the underlying reasons of laws and policies put into effect by the Soviet officials in the name of emancipating Muslim women in Central Asia. The main argument of the thesis is that even though the Soviet officials had a genuine intention for the emancipation of Central Asian women from the patriarchal structure both in the public and private spheres of life, the policies and their implementation were shaped in accordance with the basic motive of regime survival. In the first years of the Soviet regime, mostly ideological intentions shaped the women's emancipation project. However, in time, the Soviet officials needed to make more reforms in the political, economic and socio-cultural areas not just for the ideological aims such as emancipation of the women, but also for the survival of the Soviet Union. These reforms would be the main reason of the questioning the real intentions of the Soviet policies in terms of gender equality. This general attitude would have its impact and repercussions on gender issues in the post-Soviet era as well.

Keywords: Central Asia, Soviet Union, women's emancipation

ÖZ

ORTA ASYA'DA MÜSLÜMAN KADINLAR: SOVYET MİRASININ ETKİSİ

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Bu tez Sovyet öncesi, Sovyet ve Sovyet sonrası dönemlerini, Sovyet rejiminin Orta Asya Müslüman kadınlarının yaşam tarzı üzerine olan etkisini anlamak amacı ile tarihsel bir açıdan analiz etmektedir. Çalışmada özellikle Orta Asya'daki Müslüman kadınları özgürleştirmek adına Sovyet yetkilileri tarafından gerçekleştirilen yasalar ve politikaların altında yatan nedenler üzerinde durulmuştur. Tezin temel argümanı, Sovyet yetkililerinin Orta Asya'daki kadınları hem kamusal hem de özel alanda ataerkil yapıdan kurtarmak konusunda içten olmalarına rağmen, zaman içerisinde kadının özgürleştirilmesine yönelik politikalar ve uygulamaların rejimin hayatta kalması için gerekenler doğrultusunda şekillendiğidir. Sovyet rejiminin ilk yıllarında, kadınların özgürleşmesi projesi çoğunlukla ideolojik kaygılarla belirlendi. Fakat zaman içerisinde Sovyet yetkilileri sadece kadınların özgürleştirilmesi gibi ideolojik amaçlarla değil aynı zamanda Sovyetler Birliği'nin varlığını sürdürebilmesi için de siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel alanda daha fazla reform yapmaya ihtiyaç duydular. Bu reformlar Sovyet politikalarının cinsiyet eşitliği konusundaki gerçek niyetlerin sorgulanmasına temel olmuştur. Sovyet sonrası dönemde de bu genel tutumun toplumsal cinsiyet ile ilgili konulara etkisi ve yansımaları olmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Orta Asya, Sovyetler Birliği, kadının özgürleşmesi

To My Family

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses Soviet gender policies in Central Asia from a historical perspective. It will attempt to look at the intentions behind these policies regarding Central Asian women, and their outcomes in Central Asia both during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras with regard to legal, socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres of life. The aim is to show that not only ideological concerns, but also economic concerns such as labor force; political concerns such as creating a politically active communist society; and social concerns such as eradicating traditions and custom-based laws played key roles in the project of emancipation of women in Central Asia. This study, also tries to show that the emancipatory project pursued by the Soviet officials triggered tensions in the region, and weakened the hopes and expectations related to the Soviet regime. As such, it tries to understand the real intentions behind Soviet gender policies regarding women's emancipation in Central Asia.

This study gives attention to the Central Asian region and women living there. The reason making Central Asian region important to study, and not any other Muslim country, is that people in this region experienced foreign domination in their lands and were forced to accept certain gender-based policies put into effect by foreign policy makers. These policies were from the above, and sometimes ignored the necessities and values of the region. For most of the other Muslim countries, the change about the status of women also came from the above, but not by foreign policy makers. The policy makers and leaders living in these Muslim countries had their own reasons to formulate gender policies, and perhaps had a better understanding of the needs of their own people. Moreover, the atheist ideology of the Soviet regime saw religion (Islam) as a major threat.

This is yet another reason that makes Central Asia unique in terms of gender issue.

The studies about women in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras are mostly concerned with the European parts of the Soviet Union, and neglect the Muslim women under Soviet rule. Therefore, the first problem related to the literature regarding Central Asian women is that there are insufficient numbers of studies regarding this area; and the second problem is that the Western scholars studying this subject sometimes fail to understand the meaning of Islamic based customs and traditions to Central Asian women as well as men. So, this study also attempts to make a contribution to gender studies literature regarding Central Asian women.

1.1. Literature Review

Given the limitations related to space and scope, this study does not put the major emphasis on feminist literature. This work attempts to provide a historical background to the conditions of Central Asian women during the Soviet era, so it basically focuses on historical developments. However, to construct a theoretical framework for the purposes of the study, the literature on the debates about the relationship between women and the nation-state, studies on Soviet women, and studies on Central Asian women are briefly reviewed.

1.1.1. The Relationship between Women and the Nation-state

To construct a basis to understand the role or the effect of women in the policies of nations or states, and to realize the importance of gender in the history of nations, firstly, the terms sex and gender should be defined. In general, sex

refers to a biological term,¹ while gender implies a cultural term. As Marini points out, sex is used to refer to the “biologically based distinctions between sexes and the term gender to the social construction of differences between women and men.”² Therefore, when a person is born, s/he is labeled as boy or a girl, and this defines things like what color s/he dresses, or what the name of the newborn is. However, as Oakley argues, apart from this starting point of differences, there are no two cultures defining the male and female with the same qualities. Each and every society has their unique definitions and given meanings for being male and female. It can be argued that the differences related to culture, so related to gender, is not a biological certainty, but it is a result of the beliefs people keep in their minds.³ So, as Yuval-Davis indicates, if sexual divisions of labor, power and dispositions are socially constructed, and biology is not the destiny for the moral and political discourses of societies, then, social positions of women could be transformed.⁴ And this assumption gives the policy makers an opportunity to use this construction for the survival of the regime.

Yuval Davis indicates that “it is women - and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia - who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally, and symbolically.”⁵ She indicates that due to women’s potential of creativity through

¹ See Maccoby, E. E. (1988), Gender as a Social Category, *Developmental Psychology*, 24, pp.755-765. & Eagly A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in Social Behavior: A Social Role*, Routledge.

² Marini, M. M. (1990). Sex and Gender: What Do We Know?. *Sociological Forum*, 5 (1), p.95.

³ Oakley, A. (2005). *The Ann Oakley Reader: Gender, Women and Social Science*. Bristol: The Policy Press, p.8.

⁴ Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage Publications, pp.8-9.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.2.

bearing children, they are perceived to be confined within the domestic sphere.⁶ Mostly because of this qualification of reproduction, women were tended to be identified with the nature instead of culture, and their natural duties were defined within the confines of their home. However, “there are no necessary natural social effects of sexual differences or biological reproduction, and thus they are not an equivalent material basis for gender as production is for class.”⁷

What Yuval-Davis is intended to show that gender and nation are constructed by each other. The intersections of both individuals’ social lives and the projects of building nations and/or states are listed as follows: “women and the biological reproduction of the nation; cultural reproduction and gender relations; citizenship and differences; gendered militaries, gendered wars; and women, ethnicity and empowerment.”⁸ According to this, the first intersection, women and the biological reproduction of the nation, suggests that women’s natural role to bear children affects the social positioning of women, and the construction of the nations. Due to the need for people to be employed as workers, settlers, soldiers, and as a power base for the survival of the nations, the nation depends upon the mothers of the nations.⁹ The second intersection, cultural reproduction and gender relations, suggests that “gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and collectivities as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations.”¹⁰ The third intersection, citizenship and differences, suggests that

⁶ Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage Publications, p.6.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.9.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp.22-25.

⁹ *Ibid.* pp.26-29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.39.

women's citizenship should be understood both by the contrast to that of men, and by the relations of the affiliation of the women with the dominant and subordinate groups.¹¹ The fourth intersection, gendered militaries and gendered wars, deals with the gendered characters of the wars, and sexual division both during the war and after the war, and emphasizes the symbolic positions of women. The last intersectional area, women, ethnicity and empowerment, underlines the role of women in the cooperation or resistance to nationalist struggles.¹² Therefore, there is an undeniable relation between women and the nations and/or states, as women's being biological reproducers of the nations, as well as their being cultural reproducers, and also due to the differentiation of the citizenship duties and responsibilities between men and women by the state for their own sakes.

To make these intersection points more concrete, Anthias and Yuval-Davis defined five central ways for making women objects of state practices. They argue that women are seen

... as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; and/or as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; and/or as central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; and/or as signifier of ethnic/national differences; and/or as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles.¹³

Acar and Ayata, furthermore, claim that from Anatolia to Central Asia, to shape women's roles and status mostly in public life, states took several initiatives as a major part of policies regarding modernization and development. Through

¹¹ Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage Publications, p.68. See also Pateman, C. (1992). Equality, Difference, Subordination: the Politics of Motherhood and Women's Citizenship. In G. Bock, S. James *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*: Routledge, pp.14-28.

¹² *Ibid.* p.25.

¹³ Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.3.

promoting education of women, encouraging the integration of women into economic, social, and political areas, and providing legal basis for the equality before law, the states tried to consolidate their reforms. And, gender project “remained essentially limited to the creation and legitimization of a new public identity of emancipation for women.”¹⁴

1.1.2. Studies on Soviet Women

The studies related to Soviet women mostly focus on the women’s emancipation policies and their implications on the lives of the Soviet women and their families. Regarding the objectives of the Soviet Union towards women’s emancipation, there are different arguments in the literature.¹⁵ However, these differences do not necessarily mean that they are mutually exclusive. The literature mostly underlines the concerns of Soviet policy makers as ideological, legal, social, economic, and political ones.

Approaches emphasizing the ideological concerns of the Soviet Union indicate that the very first intention of the Soviet administration towards women was their equality with men. Lubin argues that right after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the ideal of emancipation of women in all regions of the country was promoted by the Soviet policy makers.¹⁶ For Engel, the emancipation of women was a revolutionary goal based on equality of women in productive

¹⁴ Acar, F. & Güneş-Ayata, A. (2000). *Conclusion*. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*. Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, pp.332-333.

¹⁵ Collins states that emancipation is a “social process through which imputedly inferior individuals and groups have been catapulted into public life.” Collins, H. (1965). *Sociology of Emancipation*. *Phylon*, 26 (2), p.148.

¹⁶ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.182.

labor and socialization of household tasks.¹⁷ Madison also points out that after the revolution, the Soviet leaders were committed to the ideal of excluding sexual exploitation through socialism and achieving sexual equality.¹⁸ Ashwin also indicates that gender was a crucial principle of the Soviet system,¹⁹ and claims that emancipation of women served its aim of subjection of the peasantry to the Bolshevik will and served for the symbolic triumph of the regime.²⁰

Likewise, legal regulations put into effect right after the Bolshevik Revolution had an intention to eliminate the dependency of women in all spheres of life. As Tay points out, women's having equal rights with their husbands in economic, social, and political areas was seen as a sign of the regime's commitment to their emancipation.²¹ However, Ashwin indicates that "the laws were designed to undermine the existing form of the peasant household which was regarded by Bolsheviks as the epitome of backwardness, a cradle of subversion, a remnant of the past which had to be transformed."²² Ishkanian also points out that

¹⁷ Engel, B. A (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.787.

¹⁸ Madison, M. (1978). Soviet Women: The 'Problemy' That Won't Go Away. *The Wilson Quarterly*, 2 (4), p.97.

¹⁹ Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.11.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.9.

²¹ Tay, A. E. (1972). The Status of Women in the Soviet Union. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 20 (4), p.670.

²² Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.8.

to stimulate the transformation and emphasize the role of women both into the labor force and within the domestic labor, Soviet officials adopted several laws.²³

In the social area, as Tay argues, the Soviet regime attempted to free women from the traditional and familial hierarchies, and from the suppression by their fathers and husbands.²⁴ However, while doing so, it attempted to create a Soviet family which “instead of serving as a conservative stronghold of the old regime, would become a functional unit in the new polity.”²⁵ Also, as Kandiyoti points out, emancipation of women was used to eliminate the traditional family structures and the kinship relations to achieve socialist transformation and cultural revolution.²⁶ Ashwin also indicates that to liberate women from the patriarchal family and from dependence on men, protection of the Soviet state was promoted for the end goal of establishing a direct link between the women and the state to transform women’s consciousness.²⁷ However, in time, the focus of the Soviet regime shifted, and as Engel points out, the idea that differences between sexes coming from biology, rather than being socially constructed, would become predominant after the 1960s. As such, natural role of women as a mother was

²³ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.164.

²⁴ Tay, A. E. (1972). The Status of Women in the Soviet Union. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 20 (4), p.662.

²⁵ Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.9.

²⁶ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?, *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.604.

²⁷ Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.10.

emphasized, with the claim of women's being sensitive and delicate, and having the capacity for nurturing. This attitude change would be one of the biggest dilemmas of Soviet gender policies.²⁸ Within this change, as Ashwin indicates, women were now seen as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation.²⁹

From the perspective of economic based intentions, the scholars emphasize the importance of women's labor force for the Soviet Union economy, and how the Soviet regime blamed the economic system as the main source of gender inequalities. Ruthchild indicates that Soviet policy makers had two main economic objectives regarding emancipation of women. One of them was the ideal of making women work outside the home. The other one was freeing them from the burdens of domestic duties and to bring them into the labor force.³⁰ However, Buckley argues that the primary goal of the Soviet regime was the survival of the regime and rapid industrialization, so equality of women was not one of the main concerns.³¹ Molyneux also argues that emancipation policies in the Soviet Union always had economic intentions behind, and these policies depended on the direction of economic policy; so social change was not in the agenda of the regime.³² As Brown points out, to establish a well-functioned economy, Soviet policy makers needed labor force, and this affected the gender

²⁸ Engel, B. A (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.89.

²⁹ Ashwin, S. (2000). *Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.11.

³⁰ Ruthchild, R. (1983). Sisterhood and Socialism: The Soviet Feminist Movement, *A Journal of Women Studies*, 7 (2), p.5.

³¹ Buckley, M. (1981). Women in the Soviet Union. *Feminist Review*, No. 8, pp.100-101.

³² Molyneux, M. (1991). The Women Question in the Age of Perestroika. *Agenda*, No. 10, p.105.

policies in the Soviet Union.³³ Schuster, moreover, emphasizes that Soviet leaders, firstly, supported the idea that there was no socialist revolution without the participation of working women,³⁴ but then, their thoughts changed and they claimed that there could be no well-functioning economy without working women.³⁵ Therefore, the working women ideal was used to serve for different consequences in the Soviet Union.

In the political sphere, as Lapidus points out, the Soviet leaders believed that while destroying the bourgeois democracy, they tried to achieve the democratization of political life with full participation of women.³⁶ However, he draws attention to the hesitation of the Soviet leaders to promote women into higher positions in politics, and their failure to manage *Zhenotdel* (women's department).³⁷ Also, Tedin and Yap point out that the Soviet women thought politics as a dirty business to be left to men to handle. Therefore, both men and women had their own reasons to depoliticize women.³⁸ Moreover, women had to work a double shift in Soviet society, both at home and in work place. So, they

³³ Field, M. G. (1968). *Workers (and Mothers): Soviet Women Today*, In Brown, D. R., *Women in the Soviet Union*, New York: Teachers College Press, p.12.

³⁴ Schuster, A. (1971). Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality. *Russian Review*, 30 (3), p.261.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.263.

³⁶ Lapidus, G. W. (1975). Political Mobilization, Participation, and Leadership: Women in Soviet Politics. *Comparative Politics*, 8 (1), p.91.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.114.

³⁸ Tedin, K. L. & Yap, O. F. (1993). The Gender Factor in Soviet Mass Politics: Survey Evidence from Greater Moscow. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46 (1), p.182.

could not have any time to be interested in politics.³⁹ As Buckley indicates, “where social and economic roles are unavoidable, political roles outside of voting and compulsory meetings within the work place are for the most part avoidable, and frequently unattractive.”⁴⁰

However, some authors claim that the Soviet policy makers did combine these intentions for the survival of the regime. It was possible to implement one policy in order to prepare grounds for another one. Lubin argues that in economic, social, and political spheres, equality of women with men was the main purpose. The Soviet leaders aimed to reach these purposes by providing women material and moral support to achieve their duties as mothers.⁴¹ As Molyneux claims, to achieve its ideological aims, the Soviet regime encouraged women to participate in labor force, legalized equality between men and women in social, political, educational and economic life, and prohibited sexual exploitation.⁴² As Tay points out, although Soviet legislation mostly focused on the economic aspects of socialist policies, rather than sexual aspects,⁴³ emancipation in the social sphere and the legal protection for women were also seen as the preconditions of the economic intentions of the Soviet policy makers. Moreover, Lapidus claims that

The conviction that sexual inequality was rooted in economics rather than biology, the Bolsheviks anticipated that changes in economic

³⁹Tedin, K. L. & Yap, O. F. (1993). The Gender Factor in Soviet Mass Politics: Survey Evidence from Greater Moscow. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46 (1), p.205.

⁴⁰ Buckley, M. (1981). Women in the Soviet Union. *Feminist Review*, No. 8, p.98.

⁴¹ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.182.

⁴² Molyneux, M. (1991). The Women Question in the Age of Perestroika. *Agenda*, No. 10, p.90.

⁴³ Tay, A. E. (1972). The Status of Women in the Soviet Union, *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 20 (4), p.670.

organization, accompanied by simultaneous efforts to alter expectations and behavior, would ultimately draw women out of the limited confines of private households and into public life. Full political participation for women depended upon the political democratization which would accompany the transformation of economic relationships.⁴⁴

In the literature discussing the consequences of the Soviet regime in terms of gender policies, the general tendency was to highlight what was achieved and what turned out to be a failure as well as to investigate the reasons behind them. Kay argues that there has been a contradiction between the ideological concerns for women's emancipation in economic and political terms, and traditional life styles determining roles of male and female. This contradiction led the Soviet regime to produce inconsistent policies and always created implementation problems.⁴⁵ As Buckley underlines, the need for women workers for the survival of the Soviet regime made women's life difficult as the regime did not promote their husbands' participation to domestic work.⁴⁶ Moreover, Schwartz argues that Soviet administration had made positive changes in educational and economic spheres, but failed to achieve its objectives in the occupational or other sectors of society. She agrees with Buckley that the Soviet officials did not struggle for the participation of men into family activities.⁴⁷ As put forward by an expert:

⁴⁴ Lapidus, G. W. (1975). Political Mobilization, Participation, and Leadership: Women in Soviet Politics. *Comparative Politics*, 8 (1), p.93.

⁴⁵ Kay, R. (2010). A Liberation from Emancipation? Changing Discourses on Women's Employment in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 18 (1), p.52.

⁴⁶ Buckley, M. (1981). Women in the Soviet Union. *Feminist Review*, No. 8, p.93.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, J. S. (1979). Women under Socialism: Role Definitions of Soviet Women. *Social Forces*, 58 (1), pp.68-69.

the gendered effects of Soviet economic, demographic and anti-religious policies ... gave rise to the Soviet paradox - high literacy and labour force participation rates against the background of high fertility rates, large families and relatively untransformed domestic divisions of labour.”⁴⁸

With regard to gender issues, it was difficult to study them with a different agenda than that of the Soviet ideology which focused on the women question from a particular perspective. Only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, ‘Gender Studies’ emerged as an independent area of study in Russia and Ukraine, resulting in increased interactions between European and American scholars of feminist thought.⁴⁹

1.1.3. Studies on Central Asian Women

In the literature, there are studies on the pre-Soviet era lifestyle of Central Asian women and how the Soviet and post-Soviet eras affected or changed it. As Chenoy clearly points out, in the pre-Soviet period Central Asian women were characterized with bride price, child marriage, and isolation from the outside world via veil, polygamy, violence and male domination. They were treated as property of their husbands. After the arrival of Soviets to the region, feudal culture of the region was confronted with the Soviet ideology. During the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet policy makers focused on the economic and cultural transformation of the region. Emancipation of women was the vital part of Soviet

⁴⁸ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?, *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.607.

⁴⁹ Kamp, M. (2009). Women’s Studies and Gender Studies in Central Asia: Are We Talking to One Another, *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, 8 (1), p.3.

policies, because Central Asian women were perceived as slaves by new regime, and religious customs and traditions were to be blamed for this.⁵⁰

Massell indicates five categories regarding the Central Asian women's relationship with the state and female inferiority in the region. Firstly, he indicates that every society has antagonisms and cleavages that are in a permanent state of change. These would be put to an end only by communism.

Secondly, there were two reasons behind the lack of social struggle in Central Asia:

For one thing, the process of struggle could be masked, as it were, by veils of harmony and solidarity spun over many generations. An experienced social analyst and revolutionary could penetrate the elaborate screens of decency and recognize the battling forces for what they were. For another thing, even if, for some reason, the named and identified parties to the proceedings failed to behave in the expected manner – and if they failed to respond with adequate intensity to the stimuli administered by a revolutionary elite – there was still no reason to relinquish one's basic expectations. Given the stage of Central Asia's socio-economic development, and given the peculiarities of established ties of kinship, custom, and religion, it was perhaps too much to hope for social fragmentation to proceed at the required rate and through conventional channels. There could be – there had to be – other ways of approaching the main tasks of the revolution.⁵¹

Thirdly, Moslem societies offer unique targets for revolutionary purposes.

According to Massell:

These targets were not strictly conventional in terms of grand revolutionary strategy, they could be quite helpful not only in bringing about or accelerating more advanced forms of social strife, but also in

⁵⁰ Chenoy, A. M. (1996). Islam, Women and Identity in Contemporary Central Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (9), p.516.

⁵¹ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 128-129.

revolutionizing and transforming the entire milieu more speedily and thoroughly than it would otherwise been possible.⁵²

In this framework, women could be the basis of such a process in the region.

Fourthly, local conditions that women had to live in were the main reasons for their resentment against the old order. Therefore, this resentment could be used for the purposes of the revolution. Women needed to be freed from the chains of traditions so that they could be the active participants of the revolution.

Lastly, due to “lack of significant revolutionary experience among Moslem women; relatively late arrival and consolidation of Soviet rule in Central Asia; the strength of kinship, customary, and religious ties”, there were high levels of female resentment and discontent. This resentment and discontent would make women the revolutionary force in Central Asia.⁵³ This resentment and discontent were mainly the result of perceiving the Soviet revolutionary policies as the enemy trying to destroy the cultural and historical values of the region and regional people, Soviet policies’ not implementing as an expected manner in the region, and commitment to the customs. Massell, as a whole, argues that:

Where a Moslem women was concerned, party activists could reason – certainly not without some psychological justification – that under the seeming bedrock of her traditional entrapment there seethed deep currents of humiliation, frustration, and hatred; and that these currents could be helped into elements not just combustible in the short term but inherently and fundamentally subversive to the entire spectrum of traditional behavior, relationships, and norms. ... A woman might endure perpetual inferiority, degradation, and segregation, but only as long as she lacked the capacity to visualize, and the opportunity to grasp, alternative possibilities. As soon as the psychological and organizational barriers were breached –

⁵² Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.129.

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 128-129.

as soon as the past and future were perceived in a radically new light – a dramatic turnabout could not fail to take place.⁵⁴

When the Soviet regime was established in the region, the policy makers had a lot to do in their minds regarding the women question. Ideologically, as Lubin indicates, the main purpose of the Soviet administration in terms of emancipation of women was the promotion of women labor force which eventually would lead to smaller families and decrease in domestic duties. These economically independent women were hoped to be the supporters of the regime, and help to transform new ideas and values in the region.⁵⁵ Also, Massell argues that one of the aims of the Soviet regime in the region was the elimination of the traditional social order to destroy the traditional family structures and kinship system. As such, Soviet policy makers depended on women to mobilize the society to reach its aim.⁵⁶

Legal regulations put into effect in Central Asia were not different from those in the rest of the Soviet Union, but some regulations had the intention of eliminating the traditional way of life in the region. As Heer and Youssef state, laws outlawed the bride price, child marriage, and polygyny, and to ensure the equality of the women in all spheres of life.⁵⁷

With regard to social sphere, Northrop argues that before the revolution, many practices of everyday life were gendered in Central Asia. Soviet

⁵⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp.130-131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.187.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.xxiii.

⁵⁷ Heer, D. M. & Youssef, N. (1977). Female Status Among Soviet Central Asian Nationalities: the Melding of Islam and Marxism and Its Implications for Population Increase. *Population Studies*, 31 (1), p.157.

administration attempted to change it.⁵⁸ Sahadeo and Zanca claim that women were leading secluded and isolated lives in the pre-Soviet era, and the Soviet regime provided them a chance for being an active part of everyday life.⁵⁹ Keller, moreover, points out that the project of emancipation of women was used to eradicate religion⁶⁰ and traditional beliefs so as to spread the ideals of the Soviet Union.⁶¹

In economic sphere, as Massell argues, in pre-Soviet era, women had no duty to work outside home and mostly had traditional duties. They were not allowed by their husbands and fathers to work outside, due to their potential contact with men. Women were working in the fields, carrying water, making clothes, cooking, and bearing the children, however, they were invisible to the commune.⁶² However, as Pascall and Manning claim, the Soviet regime tried to guarantee the visibility of women through their participation into labor force. The regime promised equal pay and equal opportunities to prevent gender

⁵⁸ Northrop, D. (2004). *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, Ithaca : Cornell University Press, p.33.

⁵⁹ Sahadeo, J., Zanca, R. (2007). *Everyday Life in Central Asia Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.34.

⁶⁰ See also Kandiyoti, D. (ed.) (1991). *Women, Islam and the State*. Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶¹ Keller, S. (1988). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), pp.20-21.

⁶² Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.98.

discrimination at work. Legal sanctions were put into effect to protect women.⁶³ The final goal was the transformation of minds for the survival of the regime.

In the political sphere, like the economic sphere, husbands and fathers did not allow their wives and daughters to join to any political organizations in Central Asia.⁶⁴ However, when the Soviet rule was established in the region, women's political mobilization was seen as vital for the regime. Massell indicates the intention of the regime in this sense as follows:

By implication, it seemed impossible to conceive of female mobilization except in stages. The first and crucial task had to be the investment of time and resources in training carefully selected native women for multi-purpose functions: as representatives and agents of the new state, as interpreters of its objectives at the grassroots, as conscious catalysts of required change, and as professional cadres staffing the new institutional framework, thus helping to shape new foci of socio-political integration under Soviet auspices.⁶⁵

In the literature, there is also a debate whether Soviet policies were colonial/ imperial or not in Central Asia. Revzin and Graffy argue that Soviet policies were not imperial in intention, but they were imperial in effect, and this led women to be attached to their traditional values stronger than ever after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Kamp indicates that the literature discussing the

⁶³ Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.248.

⁶⁴ Gorsuch, A. E. (1996). "A Woman is Not a Man": The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928. *Slavic Review*, 55 (3), p.641.

⁶⁵ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.175.

⁶⁶ Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, *Slavic Review*, 65 (2), Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, p.272.

effects of colonialism in the Central Asia argued that colonialism created new kinds of inequality between women living in the center and women living in the periphery.⁶⁷ Therefore, Soviet gender policies were similar to the other state-led modernization policies in other Muslim societies, melding state feminism and imperial purposes.⁶⁸

Regarding women's studies during the Soviet era, in 1920s, *Zhenotdel* activists in Central Asia had published booklets and articles. In the 1940s and 1950s, after the establishment of Academies of Science, studies related to women question started to be conducted in the divisions of social sciences and humanities. From the 1960s to 1980s, most of the work related to women question was about the positive impact of the Soviet regime, and how the Soviet policies improved women's lives and eradicated inequalities.⁶⁹ As Kamp argues, in Central Asia, women's studies did not really exist. The term gender entered the region only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as part of development programs, mostly by civil society organizations. So, as opposed to Russia and Ukraine, gender studies as an academic area of work did not develop in Central

⁶⁷ Kamp, M. (2009). Women's Studies and Gender Studies in Central Asia: Are We Talking to One Another, *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, 8 (1), p.4. See also, Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press. & Edgar, A. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, *Slavic Review*, 65 (2), pp.252-272. & Akiner, S. (1997). *Between Tradition and Modernity: the Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women*. In: *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*. Mary Buckley, ed., pp. 261-304. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁸ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?, *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.616.

⁶⁹ Kamp, M. (2009). Women's Studies and Gender Studies in Central Asia: Are We Talking to One Another, *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, 8 (1), p.5.

Asia, but it developed outside the academia, to get grants from the outside world.⁷⁰

1.2. Theoretical Framework of the Thesis

On the basis of above mentioned discussions, this study uses the term sex referring biological differences between the two sexes, and the term gender as a social construction, therefore underlines its characteristic of being able to be changed. Therefore, in accordance with the aim of this work, the term gender is limited to women and their roles in the social, economic, and historical areas of life during the Soviet era.

This study uses the term gender emancipation to indicate two interrelated issues: first, the term implies the equality of women with men in all spheres of life; second, it reflects the responses to and changes within the emancipation project of the Soviet Union. As such, it aims to see the whole picture from the perspectives of both the Soviet policy makers and Central Asian woman. In short, this study uses the term gender emancipation as the equality of women with men, and freeing women from their socially constructed roles within the general mentality of the Soviet regime.

In the debates related to women in Soviet Union and Central Asia, five categories defined by Anthias and Yuval-Davis, as “women and the biological reproduction of the nation; cultural reproduction and gender relations; citizenship and differences; gendered militaries, gendered wars; and women, ethnicity and empowerment” will constitute the basis of this study, while giving attention to the intersection points of the state and the gender policies defined by Yuval-Davis. Whether Soviet gender policies fit or not into one or more of these categories will

⁷⁰ Kamp, M. (2009). Women’s Studies and Gender Studies in Central Asia: Are We Talking to One Another, *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, 8 (1), pp.3-4.

be examined. Also, Massell's categorization on Central Asian women will be the basis of the discussion over Soviet policies in the region.

As indicated earlier, based on the main motives as well as the relevant literature, the research question of this study is the following: what were the real intentions behind Soviet gender policies regarding women's emancipation in Central Asia? Based on these questions, this work basically aims at showing the life of women in the region before the Soviet rule, how and why this changed or was changed during the Soviet era, and what the post-Soviet implications of Soviet gender policies are.

1.3. Outline and Methodology

Chapter 1 of this study focuses on the Muslim women in Central Asia in pre-Soviet era and the effect of religion and customs on women's life. In Chapter 2, it attempts to analyze the basic approaches to gender issue/women question from the perspectives of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, and Joseph Stalin, who were the basic figures behind Soviet gender policies. Chapter 3 analyses the position of Muslim women in Central Asia during the Soviet era on the basis of legal, socio-cultural, economic and political policies regarding gender emancipation. In this chapter, the basic Soviet mentality about women's emancipation and how it shifted from time to time are also analyzed. In Chapter 4, the position of Central Asian women in the post-Soviet period is examined. The conclusion focuses on the successes and failures of the Soviet regime in terms of gender policies in Central Asia.

For this thesis, literature on gender and nation building regarding Central Asia and the Soviet Union will be used. Finding accurate and verifiable statistical data would be the constraints of the study. And, as methodology, first and second hand sources will be used for making qualitative analysis.

CHAPTER 2

2. IDEAS OF LEADING SOVIET ACTORS ON GENDER ISSUE

This chapter examines the basic approaches and understandings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin on women question. These four figures should be considered to have the highest degree of influence on the formulation of policies regarding the emancipation of women.⁷¹ For the reason that Marx and Engels approached the woman question in the same way in most of their work, it would be logical to study their thoughts on the issue together.

Although many conferences were organized and many studies have been conducted on female equality, women all around the world have always faced prejudices and social oppression. Needless to say, the characteristics of male supremacy may vary from one society to another, but, in the most contexts men are perceived as the superior sex and women are forced to accept this supremacy.⁷² As mentioned earlier, in the Soviet regime, the basic ideas about women's emancipation come mainly from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, who basically examined the woman question mostly on the basis of economic conditions. In the Marxist literature, the question of equality between sexes has frequently been conceptualized as "woman question", the

⁷¹ The reason why only the policies of Stalin (and not of Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev) are examined in this chapter is due to the fact that Stalin was the head of the Soviet regime for over 30 years. In his era, certain policies that would deeply affect the lives of Soviet women were put into application. These policies, which would be backbone of the successive ones formulated by other leaders after Stalin, are analyzed in the next chapter.

⁷² Marxism, Feminism & Women's Liberation, Retrieved November 11, 2011 from <http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no19fem.pdf>, p.1.

emphasis being on economic surplus and accumulation of private property as the main determinants of subordination of women.⁷³ As Hartmann argues:

The woman question has never been the 'feminist question'. The feminist question is directed at the causes of sexual inequality between women and men, of male dominance over women. Most Marxist analyses of women's position take as their question the relationship of women to the economic system, rather than that of women to men, apparently assuming the latter will be explained in their discussion of the former. ... Defining women as part of the working class, these analyses consistently subsume women's relation to men under workers' relation to capital.⁷⁴

This argument emphasizes the main standpoint of the Soviet regime regarding woman question, as will be elaborated in the following section of this chapter.

2.1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

This section analyzes the basic approaches of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on the woman question by looking at the issues of human nature and freedom of human beings; female initiative in historical context; private property and women under capitalism; women in the historical context of family and finally women under communism. This division was made for two purposes: to give general ideas about the relationship between men and women and to provide historical development of this relationship on the basis of changing modes of production.

⁷³ K.B., Usha. (2005). Political Empowerment of Women in Soviet Union and Russia: Ideology and Implementation. *International Studies*, 42 (2), p.143.

⁷⁴ Hartmann, H. (2010). The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union. In J. F. Sitton *Marx Today: Selected Works and Recent Debates*, New York. Palgrave Macmillan, p.202.

2.1.1. Human Nature and Freedom of Human Beings

It is important to understand how Marx perceived the position of human beings in general to examine his viewpoint on women in particular. Marx underlines the importance for an individual to be his own master if s/he wants to be an independent being. Marx indicates that “a man who lives by the favor of another considers himself a dependent being. But I live completely by another person’s favor when I owe to him not only the continuance of my life but also *its creation*; when he is its *source*. My life has necessarily such a cause outside itself if it is not my own creation.”⁷⁵ So, it can be concluded from this view that, one of the main purposes of Marx regarding individuals was to free men and women with the creation of their individual personalities.

Marx indicates that creativity distinguishes human beings from animals, giving them the ability to change the conditions they live in. This capacity of human beings is mainly determined by society. Likewise, human nature could develop depending on the structure of society and the place of the human being in it.⁷⁶ According to Marx, it is just under communism that human nature could mature. Only under communism, self determined activity had a chance to occur. In the absence of private property, surplus value and exploitation, alienation is not an option for the society. For Marx and Engels:

Character and mode of life reflected the individual’s place in economic production. Human nature was shaped by the prevailing mode of production, be it feudal, capitalist, socialist or communist. As the inevitable progress from feudal economic relations to communist ones took place, the opportunities for warping or maturing human nature would

⁷⁵ Fromm, E. (2004). *Marx’s Concept of Man*. London, Newyork: The Continuum Publishing Company, p.31. 8 [Emphasis original].

⁷⁶ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.20.

vary. Individual self-determination and freedom were viewed as possible only under communism.⁷⁷

In this general framework, Marx examines the relationship between men and women in a social context, as the measure of humanity in the society. According to him:

From this relationship one can therefore judge man's whole level of development. From the character of this relationship follows how much *man* as a *species-being*, as *man*, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being. It therefore reveals the extent to which man's *natural* behavior has become *human*, or the extent to which the human essence in him has become a *natural* essence – the extent to which his *human nature* has come to be *natural* to him.⁷⁸

Needles to say, for Marx, the revolution was not all about the changing production relations. It meant much more than this. As an expert commented: “Marx means by revolution a thorough-going change in modes of production, together with a thorough-going change of men: their ideas and relationships, their habits and pleasures, their institutions.”⁷⁹ As such, to achieve real freedom of human beings and develop their human nature, socialist revolution was seen as a major way.

Marx also considers female initiative in historical context. He suggests that the relationship between men and women had to be examined in their historical context. By historical context, he does not emphasize the chronological developments or the reasons behind the changes. For him, historical context is

⁷⁷ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.21.[Emphasis original].

⁷⁹ Le Baron, B. (1971). Marx on Human Emancipation. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 4 (4), p.549.

more about finding out the historical processes leading way to the creation of a certain mode of production in any given time (e.g. capitalism).⁸⁰ Only after realizing that, the importance of the participation of women into revolutionary forces shall be understood. Marx and Engels saw women's emancipation firstly as self determination of human beings which leads the way to their emancipation. Then, only after that, the emancipation of women is possible, which will be realized by the revolution.

Marx indicates in 1868 in a letter to Ludwig Kugel-mann that "everyone who knows anything of history also knows that great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment."⁸¹ In addition to that, he underlines that to eliminate hunger, exploitation, poverty and male supremacy, women need to take action into their hands and destroy the existing system through which they gain their emancipation, a goal worth struggling for.⁸²

Klotz argues that Engels shared similar opinions:

Gender relations function as both a microcosm for the labor relations of the contemporary mode of production and, simultaneously, as a kind of historical museum where the labor relations of bygone modes of production are preserved. A woman is, of course, her husband's proletariat, yet because she sells her sexuality, alongside her labor power, for her entire lifetime, she is also his slave. In an agricultural social order, she is his serf. Hence, sexuality constitutes a mode of human activity that is alienated under capitalism just as labor is alienated. Yet it distinguishes itself at least as it pertains to married women in that it retains additional,

⁸⁰ Gimenez, M. A (2005). Capitalism and the Opression of Women: Marx Revisited. *Science and Society*, 69 (1), p.17.

⁸¹ Marxism, Feminism & Women's Liberation, Retrieved November 11, 2011 from <http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no19fem.pdf>, p.8.

⁸² *Ibid.* p 8.

anachronistic modes of alienation that no longer apply to the contemporary mode of coercive labor power.⁸³

So, for both Marx and Engels, only after the catastrophic effect of the capitalist mode of production become influential and visible in the women's life and made them slaves in their own houses, they would be the inseparable and indispensable part of the revolution.

2.1.2. Private Property and Women under Capitalism

Marx and Engels analyze the status of woman in the society as connected to private property, and do not focus on gender relations specifically, but on class relations which were created out of the private property. As Marx argues:

Crude communism appears in a double form; the domination of material property looms so large that it aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. ...this tendency to oppose general private property to private property is expressed in an animal form; marriage (which is incontestably a form of exclusive private property) is contrasted with the community of women, in which women become communal and common property. One may say that this idea of the community of women is the open secret of this entirely crude and unreflective communism. Just as women are to pass from marriage to universal prostitution, so the whole world of wealth (i.e., the objective being of man) is to pass to the relation of universal prostitution with the community. This communism, which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property, which is this negation. ... The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labor as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community.⁸⁴

⁸³ Klotz, M. (2006). Alienation, Labor, and Sexuality in Marx's 1844 Manuscripts. *A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 18 (3), p.407.

⁸⁴ Fromm, E. (2004). *Marx's Concept of Man*. London, Newyork: The Continuum Publishing Company, pp.31-32.

Marx believes that class is the reason for oppression of women, not gender relations.⁸⁵ He and Engels claim that the very first class struggle in human history was the struggle between man and woman. In this struggle, man oppressed woman on the basis of private property.⁸⁶ Marx indicates that the emancipation of woman primarily relies on her economic independence and when the capitalist class is not the owner of the means of production.

Marx and Engels believe that women are thought as the private property, as slaves because of the capitalist system. For example, Engels argues that women were serving men in the bourgeois family, they were demanded to be monogamous, and were expected to raise the future owners of the private property. However, lack of private property provided proletarian women a sort of freedom compared to women in the bourgeois family.⁸⁷ So, to achieve complete equality between man and woman, Engels underlines the existence of collective property for the means of production. Likewise, as indicated in *Die Deutsche Ideologie* (1846), Marx and Engels claim that “The Frau and the children are the slaves of the man . . . This raw and latent slavery in the family is the first private property.”⁸⁸

Marx and Engels, also, argue that:

⁸⁵ K.B., Usha. (2005). Political Empowerment of Women in Soviet Union and Russia: Ideology and Implementation. *International Studies*, 42 (2), p.142.

⁸⁶ Schuster, A. (1971). Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality. *Russian Review*, 30 (3), p.260.

⁸⁷ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 162-166. These points will be elaborated further in the coming section.

⁸⁸ Leeb, C. (2007). Marx and the Gendered Structure of Capitalism. *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 33 (7), p.844.

Where capitalism exists men would retain their privileges over women. Even where political liberty exists, women will be in a position of double slavery since workers live in poverty and wage slavery. They also found that the process of production and reproduction is inter-related in a capitalist society. So, the nature of the unit of reproduction in the family is transformed according to the changes in the process of production and in the relations of production. Thus, they identify the inter-relation between class struggle and the struggle against the oppression of women.⁸⁹

As such, for Marx and Engels, women's participation to labor force is one basic condition to change these conditions. As Engels argues:

[To] emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from socially productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.⁹⁰

According to Marx, in capitalist society, women lived under subordinate position, and it was believed that equality between man and woman can only be achieved through participation of woman into labor market and sharing domestic responsibilities with man. It has been stated that:

in the final analysis, economic power is the mainstream, the most important source. ... it has been the forces of production and their control that have exerted the most important influences on the stratification system, social change, and the various other institutions of the society.⁹¹

⁸⁹ K.B., Usha. (2005). Political Empowerment of Women in Soviet Union and Russia: Ideology and Implementation. *International Studies*, 42 (2), pp.142-143.

⁹⁰ Buckley, M. (1989). Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.22.

⁹¹ Blumberg, R. L. (1984). A General Theory of Gender Stratification. *Sociological Theory*, 2, p.41.

Schwartz summarizes the solution for the equality of sexes as; “the nuclear family would cease to be the economic unit of society, private domestic work would change into a public industry, and the care and education of the young would be a public matter.”⁹²

Engels states that social institutions were stipulated by the stage of development of labour, and of the family. He argues that:

The less the development of labour, and the more limited its volume of production and, therefore, the wealth of society, the more preponderatingly does the social order appear to be dominated by ties of sex. However, within this structure of society based on ties of sex, the productivity of labour develops more and more; with it, private property and exchange, differences in wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labour power of others, and thereby the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which strive in the course of generations to adapt the old structure of society to the new conditions, until, finally, the incompatibility of the two leads to a complete revolution. The old society, built on groups based on ties of sex, bursts asunder in the collision of the newly-developed social classes; in its place a new society appears, constituted in a state, the lower units of which are no longer groups based on ties of sex but territorial groups, a society in which the family system is entirely dominated by the property system, and in which the class antagonisms and class struggles, which make up the content of all hitherto written history, now freely develop.⁹³

2.1.3. Women in the Historical Context of Family

To investigate the positions of Marx and Engels on the family and women’s place in family, Engels’s touchstone book of the Origin of the Family Private Property and the State guides the readers. Engels, in this book, analyzes the structure of the family in different social stages, and examines the role of

⁹² Schwartz, J. S. (1979). Women under Socialism: Role Definitions of Soviet Women. *Social Forces*, 58 (1), p.68.

⁹³ Engels, F. S. (1988). Engels on the Origin and Evolution of the Family. *Population and Development Review*, 14 (4), pp.707-708.

matriarchy, patriarchy and changing relations within the family throughout these stages. He especially draws attention to the issue of women in capitalist societies.

Engels suggests that in primeval stage “unrestricted sexual intercourse existed within a tribe, so that every woman belonged to every man and, vice versa.”⁹⁴ He clarifies that in the primeval history, both polygamy and polyandry existed in the family. In this family type, children were commonly raised. As monogamy developed, these relations were one by one eliminated and present-day couples made of one wife and husband emerged. As Engels suggests “it has lately become fashionable to deny the existence of this early stage of human sex life. ... I can only conclude from all these facts that they [early findings] prove absolutely nothing for man and the primeval conditions of his life.”⁹⁵ He suggests that the most primitive form of family is the group marriage, “the form in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women mutually belong to one another, leaving only small scope for jealousy.”⁹⁶ After analyzing the primeval stage, Engels moves on to classify certain family types derived from this initial form. The first form he looks at is called the Consanguine Family. It is the very first attempt towards a more modern version of family. In this form:

all the grandfathers and grandmothers within a certain family are mutually husbands and wives; and equally their children, the fathers and mothers; whose children form a third circle of common mutual mates. The children of these again, the great-grandchildren of the first cycle, will form a fourth. In this form of the marriage, then, only ancestors and descendants are excluded from what we call the rights and duties of marriage.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.38.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.39.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp.44-45.

The second form is the Punaluan Family, where mutual intercourse of parents and children was eliminated and, the brother and sister was excluded from sexual intercourse.⁹⁸ The third form is called as the Pairing Family. In this form, both men and women had many wives and husbands, but a man has one chief wife within his many wives, and he is the most important husband to her among other husbands. This form of marriage helped to clearly identify the groups of brothers and sisters who did not have a permission to marry each other.⁹⁹ However, this form did not guarantee an independent household as communistic housekeeping survived. There was still “the supremacy of women in the house; as surely as exclusive recognition of a natural mother and the consequent impossibility of identifying the natural father signify high esteem for women.”¹⁰⁰ The fourth form was the Monogamous Family derived from the Pairing Family. This family was based on the supremacy of man to generate children of undisputed paternity. This was important because these children, after the demise of their father, would become the natural heirs of their father’s property. In this form of marriage, only the man had the right to dissolve the marriage. Engels suggests that

the privilege of conjugal faithlessness remains sanctioned for men as least by custom. ... This privilege is more and more enjoyed with the increasing development of society. If the woman remembers the ancient sexual practices and attempts to revive them, she is punished more severely than ever.¹⁰¹

This is the origin of the monogamy, which is not the consequence of the individual sex-love. This family was based on the economic conditions, on the

⁹⁸ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.46.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.56.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.60.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.75.

victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property.¹⁰²

According to Engels:

In an old unpublished manuscript, written by Marx and myself in 1846, I find the words: “The first division of labor is that of man and wife in breeding children.” And today I can add: The first class antagonism appearing in history coincides with the development of the antagonism of man and wife in monogamy, and the first class oppression with that of the female by the male sex. Monogamy was a great historical progress. But by the side slavery and private property, it marks at the same time same that epoch which, reaching down to our days, takes with all progress also a step backwards, relatively speaking, and develops the welfare and advancement of one by the woe and submission of the other. It is the cellular form of civilized society which enables us to study the nature of its now fully developed contrasts and contradictions.¹⁰³

The important thing here is that, as Engels points out, what monogamy brings as new is the adultery which “became an unavoidable social institution-denounced, severely punished, but irrepressible.”¹⁰⁴ But, the marriage here is not based on the sex-love between man and woman. It is stated that the basic reason for the development and the acceptance of monogamy for the bourgeois men was the will of transmission of their wealth to their natural heirs, their own children. So, for Engels, although monogamy was one of the major advances in the history, it basically depended upon the property related concerns. In this framework, for the proletarian family private property did not matter because they did not have any. For this reason, the mutual love could develop only among the proletarians. This meant that the domination of men over women was superfluous because

¹⁰² Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.79.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* pp.79-80.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp.81-82.

“there is no stimulus whatever here to assert male domination.”¹⁰⁵ Engels indicates that:

Civil law protecting male rule applies only to the possessing classes and their intercourse with proletarians. Law is expensive and therefore the poverty of the laborer makes it meaningless for his relation to his wife. Entirely different personal and social conditions decide in this case. And finally, since the great industries have removed women from the home to labour market and to the factory, the last remnant of man rule in the proletarian home has lost its ground.... thus the family of the proletarian is no longer strictly monogamous. ... In short, the proletarian marriage is monogamous in the etymological sense of the word, by no means in a historical sense.¹⁰⁶

In terms of legal inequality between husband and wife, Engels argues that this inequality depends upon the economic oppression of woman. In the old form of communistic household, the task of women was to manage the household, and it was a publicly and socially necessary institution. With the monogamous family, change was inevitable. The management of the household lost its public face, and became a private matter resulting in the exclusion of the wife from public production. There emerges the idea that if a woman becomes part of production outside home, she will not be able to manage her household duties. The proletarian women, however, can become part of public production at the age of modern large-scale industry, at the expense of family duties. So, Engels concludes:

The modern monogamous family is founded on the open or disguised domestic slavery of women, and modern society is a mass composed of molecules in the form of monogamous families. In the great majority of

¹⁰⁵ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.23.

¹⁰⁶ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, pp.86-87.

cases the man has to earn a living and to support his family, at least among the possessing classes. He thereby obtains a superior position that has no need of any legal special privilege. In the family, he is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat.... likewise the peculiar character of man's rule over woman in the modern family, the necessity and the manner of accomplishing the real social equality of the two, will appear in broad daylight only then, when both of them will enjoy complete legal equality. It will then be seen that the emancipation of women is primarily dependent on the reintroduction of the whole female sex into public industries. To achieve this, the monogamous family must cease to be the industrial unit of the society.¹⁰⁷

Marx and Engels point out that family is the first place for oppression of women. Marx explains his view on the basis of unequal distribution of labor and male supremacy over women and children in the family, while Engels explains this view on the basis of patriarchal character of the family. However, both Marx and Engels underline the reason of inequality within the family as the division of labor in the capitalist society. Sexual division plays a part in this society as well. So, as mentioned before, the first form of the property comes from the family itself "where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property."¹⁰⁸ To eliminate this structure of slavement, a new family form that does not define itself with the property is required for guaranteeing the emancipation of women.¹⁰⁹

Engels draws attention to the evolution of the family to underline the struggle between man and woman by his work. He argues that the tension between the sexes in the monogamous family is a kind of class tension, and the oppression toward woman in the family is a form of class oppression. Evolution,

¹⁰⁷ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.89-90.

¹⁰⁸ German, L. (1989). *Sex, Class and Socialism*. London, Chicago, Melbourne: Bookmarks, p.22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.22.

as Engels claims, is dialectic: monogamy being “a great historical advance” was important, but “every advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the well-being and development of ... one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other.”¹¹⁰ So, for Engels, the evolution of the family is a step towards socialist revolutions.

2.1.4. Women under Communism

The solution of Marx and Engel to eliminate the oppression of women was communism. As mentioned earlier, according to Engels, participation to labor force had a positive effect on the emancipation of women. Hartmann indicates that:

capitalism would abolish sex differences and treat all workers equally. Women would become economically independent of men and would participate on equal footing with men in bringing about the proletarian revolution. After the revolution, when all people would be workers and private property abolished, women would be emancipated from capital as well as from men.¹¹¹

Therefore, the only solution for women to get economic, social and cultural equality was the socialist reorganization.

Engels sees the family as an active element, rather than a stationary one, and concludes that “while the family undergoes living changes, the system of consanguinity ossifies; while the system survives by force of custom, the family

¹¹⁰ Engels, F. S. (1988). Engels on the Origin and Evolution of the Family. *Population and Development Review*, 14 (4), p.706.

¹¹¹ Hartmann, H. (2010). The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union. In J. F. Sifton *Marx Today: Selected Works and Recent Debates*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.203.

outgrows it.”¹¹² For Marx and Engels, the foundation of the bourgeois family is capital and private gain: “In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians.”¹¹³ So, they believe that the family would be no longer the basic unit of the society with the abolition of the capitalism because under communism that would not be necessary.¹¹⁴

As mentioned above, Engels prevails that the foundation of the monogamy was based on the economic concerns, mainly transmitting the wealth of the husband to his children. But, this situation results in monogamy on the side of woman, not the man. So, he underlines that the socialist revolution will reduce the importance of heritage due to destruction of the private property, by transforming it into the property of all people, all society. Monogamy will not disappear, but the real meaning of it will be experienced by both husband and wife due to the elimination of private property. When the family is no longer the economic unit of the society which will enjoy the benefits of collective property, it becomes part of the social industry.¹¹⁵

Engels also argues that marriage is a contract according to bourgeois conception. In the contract, the parties’ voluntary entrance to this union is required as a rule; however everybody knows how this contract was made and

¹¹² Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.37.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p.21.

¹¹⁴ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.25.

¹¹⁵ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.91.

who the real parties in the marriage were.¹¹⁶ So, he proposes that only after the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and property relations affecting the choice of the partner in terms of economic considerations, marriages will be free. When that happens, there would be only mutual fondness to affect the partner choice.¹¹⁷

Therefore, Marx and Engels strongly believe that abolishment of private property would end gender exploitation. Due to unequal division of labor within family, man has control over woman and children, and woman is forced to take care of domestic duties. Only when these duties can be turned into the social responsibilities, women can experience equality within the house. Engels predicts that “real equality of women and men can become a fact only when the exploitation of either by capital has been abolished and private housework has been transformed into a public industry.”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, what Marx and Engels desired for communist women was the exact opposite of bourgeois women.

After the revolution and the change in the mode of production, what Engels expects is the emergence of

a race of men who never in their lives have had any occasion for buying with money or other economic means of power the surrender of a woman; a race of women who have never had any occasion for surrendering to any man for any other reason but love, or for refusing to surrender to their lover from fear of economic consequences.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, pp.96-97.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp.98-99.

¹¹⁸ Engels, F. S. (1988). Engels on the Origin and Evolution of the Family. *Population and Development Review*, 14 (4), p.725.

¹¹⁹ Engels, F. (2001 (reprinted from 1902 edition)). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.100.

2.2. Vladimir Lenin

This section discusses Lenin's views on the position of women by looking at the position of women prior to revolution and the position of women after the revolution. It aims to give a general picture of what he has in his mind regarding women question and how he sees communism as an emancipatory force for women.

2.2.1. The Position of Women Prior to Revolution

Lenin mostly focuses on the oppressed position of women in the capitalist society and underlines their exploitation in this society. It must, however, be emphasized that Lenin's ideas show great similarities with those of Marx and Engels. He indicates that:

Present-day capitalist society conceals within itself numerous cases of poverty and oppression ... At the *best* of times, the scattered families of poor townspeople, artisans, workers, employees and petty officials live in incredible difficulties ... Millions upon millions of women in such families live (or, rather, exist) as "domestic slaves", striving to feed and clothe their family on pennies, at the cost of desperate daily effort and "saving" on everything—except their own labour. It is these women that the capitalists most willingly employ as home-workers, who are prepared for a monstrously low wage to "earn a little extra" for themselves and their family, for the sake of a crust of bread. It is from among these women, too, that the capitalists of all countries recruit for themselves ... All the oppressed and exploited classes throughout the history of human societies have always been forced ... to give up to their oppressors, first, their unpaid labour and, second, their women as concubines for the "masters".¹²⁰ Slavery, feudalism and capitalism are identical in this respect. It is only the *form* of exploitation that changes; the exploitation

¹²⁰ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.28.

itself remains. ... A display of proletarian women's poverty and indigence will bring a different benefit: it will help wage-slaves, both men and women, to understand their condition, look back over their "life", ponder the conditions for emancipation from this perpetual yoke of want, poverty, prostitution and every kind of outrage against the have-nots.¹²¹

In the speech at the first All-Russia Congress of Working Women in 1918, Lenin argued that bringing women into action was one of the most difficult things in the country. He, also, indicated that in many civilized countries, women were recognized as the domestic slaves, and they did not enjoy equality in the capitalist countries.¹²² He believed this position of women to be a driving force for the revolution, and focused on the importance of participation of women to the revolution. In other words, Lenin strongly believed that women were the key actors for the success of socialist revolution and their participation into the workforce alongside with men was a basic necessity.¹²³ He gave responsibility to woman to achieve goals of socialism. Lenin believed that:

women were oppressed under capitalism at work and at home and that only socialist revolution could free them. He gave full backing to the politicization of women since he saw this as leading to both women's liberation and successful revolution. Indeed, without women's involvement in revolutionary activities, or support for them, political change was unlikely to come about.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.29.[Emphasis original].

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.61-62.

¹²³ Schuster, A. (1971). Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality. *Russian Review*, 30 (3), pp.260-261.

¹²⁴ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.25.

Lenin, in the revolutionary activities, usually mentioned about the emancipation of women workers and the peasant women. From the very beginning of revolutionary activities, Lenin focused on the status of these women and tried to bring them into the revolutionary movement of the working class.¹²⁵ When he was in exile in 1899, he wrote one pamphlet about women and the workers' cause, describing the position of women factory workers and women peasants. In this study he claimed that the only way for the emancipation of women was to push them to participate into the revolutionary movement, and the triumph of the working class was seen as the only way to bring emancipation for all women.¹²⁶

2.2.2. The Position of Women after the Revolution

Lenin suggested that for the success of the socialist regime, the emancipation of women was needed. He saw a close link between the emancipation of women and the survival of regime. Lenin classified the policies to be implemented under communism for women's emancipation under four categories: firstly, promoting legal rights; secondly, guaranteeing economic independence; thirdly, giving women political and administrative duties; and finally, saving them from the bondage of the household burdens.

As for the first point, one of the first things that the Soviet regime attempted was to abolish the restrictions on the rights of the women. Lenin underlined that nowhere but in Soviet Russia, the full equality of working women was guaranteed.¹²⁷ He further stated that "the Soviet government is doing

¹²⁵ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p.8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p.61-62.

everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work.”¹²⁸

Lenin suggested that the first step for the emancipation of women was to enact laws guaranteeing the equality between sexes before the law.¹²⁹ He explained that by this equality between men and women did not only refer to the equality in terms of labour productivity, the quantity of labour, the length of the working day, and conditions in which they work in; this equality was basically about saving women from the oppression that they had faced, due to their position in the family.

The second step in terms of women’s emancipation should be the abolition of the private property, and private ownership of lands and factories. Lenin underlined that “this and this alone opens up the way towards a complete and actual emancipation of woman, her liberation from ‘household bondage’ through transition from petty individual housekeeping to large-scale socialized domestic services.”¹³⁰ For him, socialism could really work out when women joined the productive labour force; it could only start with the emancipation of women from “petty, stultifying, unproductive work.”¹³¹ Considering Marxist ideas, Lenin argued for creating an environment in which women would be truly free. According to him, “In order to achieve the complete emancipation of women and

¹²⁸ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.62.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* pp.85-86.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* pp.85-86.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p.71.

to make them really equal with men, we must have social economy, and the participation of women in general productive labor.”¹³²

Therefore, the economic participation of women to the labor force was seen as a crucial part of the emancipation of women. A similar attitude is seen in terms of peasant women. For example, regarding the collectivization of agriculture, Lenin indicated the following:

The expropriation of the expropriators is accomplished, that is, when the landowners are dispossessed of their landed estates and the capitalists of their factories, free workers will be united into ... communal ... ownership of the land and the means of production they create will be established. Small-scale and middle peasant farming shackled women, tied them to the individual households, and narrowed their outlook; they were in fact slaves of their husbands, who often beat them cruelly. ... Collectivization transforms the peasant from a small proprietor into a collectivist ... and emancipates women.¹³³ ... In the last few years there has been a tremendous growth of political consciousness of the masses. Political departments at the machine and tractor stations (whose membership also includes women's organizers) will help not only to consolidate the collective farms, but will also help collective farmers, men and women, to get rid of surviving prejudices and cultural backwardness; lack of rights for women will become a thing of the past.¹³⁴

In terms of the third policy about political and administrative participation of women, Lenin emphasized women's being visible in both political and public sphere of life for constructing socialism.¹³⁵ In addition to participation to the

¹³² K.B., Usha. (2005). Political Empowerment of Women in Soviet Union and Russia: Ideology and Implementation. *International Studies*, 42 (2), pp.142-145.

¹³³ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). On the Emancipation of Women. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.13.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p.14.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p.47.

labour force, being active in the administration of the state was required as a condition for the emancipation of women. So, Lenin focused on the importance of electing more women to the Soviet administrative mechanism. He would say: “Send more working women to the Moscow Soviet! Let the Moscow proletariat show that it is prepared to do everything, and is doing everything, to fight for victory, to fight the old inequality, the old bourgeois humiliation of women!”¹³⁶ To draw the masses into politics, he believed that, first thing to do was to draw the women into politics.¹³⁷ He indicated that there was a need for commissions and party bureaus to encourage women for political participation. What he was advocating, however, “was not bourgeois feminism, it was instead revolutionary expediency.”¹³⁸ He, also states that “It is true that the women were only part of rural society ... the Soviet Union could not exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat unless the women were won over.”¹³⁹

However, for Lenin legal equality was only the first step towards real emancipation. He suggested that:

Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or

¹³⁶ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, pp.80-81.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* pp.85-86.

¹³⁸ Farnsworth, B. B. (1976). Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai. *The American Historical Review*, 81 (2), p.296.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* p.304.

rather when its wholesale transformation into a large-scale socialist economy begins.¹⁴⁰

Finally, in terms of household responsibilities of women, Lenin pointed out that women had always been regarded as slaves due to their bondage to their homes. So, the solution for the emancipation of the women was socialism that would enable them to be part of collective work.¹⁴¹

Like Engels, Lenin believed that redefinition of women's roles could only be achieved through the "transformation of sundry household chores into the great socialist economy."¹⁴² To do so, each government had to improve the health of mother and children, establish household services for child care, to eliminate household burden of women. Lenin stated that woman would "remain a domestic slave in spite of all liberating laws" as long as housework remained isolated labor conducted in the home.¹⁴³

Regarding raising children (unlike the bourgeois view of the more the children the more poverty) Lenin argued that children were the future in the fight against capitalism, and the socialist victory was meant to build bright future for them.¹⁴⁴ Lenin was against bourgeois marriages in which women were oppressed

¹⁴⁰ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, pp.65-66.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.61-62.

¹⁴² Croll, E. J. (1981). *Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences*. *Signs*, 7 (2), p.365.

¹⁴³ Reid, S. E. (2005). *The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (22), pp.291-292.

¹⁴⁴ Lenin, V. I. (2004 (reprinted from 1977 edition)). *On the Emancipation of Women*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, p.10.

under family bondage, but he also believed that simply giving the right to women to leave their husbands, would not mean them to do so. He did not see this topic as important topic for the realization of socialist ideals and he did not want discussions about women's emancipation to turn into the discussions about the marriage and sexual problems. He would declare:

I could not believe my ears... the first state of proletarian dictatorship is battling with the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world... But active Communist women are but discussing sex problems and the forms of marriage – past, present, future.¹⁴⁵

So, for Lenin, the emancipation of women should be an important part of socialist cause. According to him, “the liberation of workers must be the cause of workers themselves, and in just the same way, the liberation of women workers must be the cause of women workers themselves.”¹⁴⁶

2.3. Joseph Stalin

This section examines the views of Stalin on women by looking at his speeches made at various occasions, as well as economic and social concerns that he had regarding the woman question.

2.3.1. Speeches of Joseph Stalin

To focus on what Stalin idealized in his mind regarding women in a socialist society, rather than underlying what he did during his regime, it seems

¹⁴⁵ Attwood, L. (1999). *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, p.5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.9.

important to focus on his speeches and try to understand the main concerns that he had regarding woman question.¹⁴⁷

One important point that needs to be made about these speeches is Stalin's attitude of addressing *both* men and women. For example, he addressed the crowd in one of his speeches during the Second World War, on July 3, 1941, as follows: "Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, men of our Army and Navy! My words are addressed to you, dear friends!" In another speech at the Red Army Parade on the Red Square on November 7, 1941, he addressed the crowd as such: "Comrades, men of the Red Army and Red Navy, commanders and political instructors, working men and working women, collective farmers-men and women, workers in the intellectual professions, brothers and sisters ... , and our valiant men and women guerillas... !" Likewise, in the Victory Speech that he made on May 9, 1945 he addressed the Soviet nation as follows: "Comrades! Men and women compatriots!"¹⁴⁸

The introduction parts of these speeches give the clue that Stalin wanted to show both to the people of the Soviet Union and the other countries that under his rule, both man and woman were equals, they played equal parts in the survival and ideals of the regime.

Another important point that needs to be taken into account is how Stalin addressed several different issues regarding women's emancipation all together in his speeches. For example, on the 5th Anniversary of First Women Workers' and Peasants' Congress in 1923, he addressed the crowd as follows:

The women worker stands shoulder to shoulder with the man worker. She works with him on the common task of building our industry. She can help the common cause if she is politically conscious and politically educated.

¹⁴⁷ What Stalin has done regarding woman question and which policies were promoted in his era will be examined in Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph Stalin Historical Speeches, Retrieved November 2, 2012 from <http://greatspeeches.wordpress.com/category/twentieth-century-speeches/joseph-stalin>

But she can ruin the common cause if she is downtrodden and backward, not, of course, as a result of her ill-will, but because of her backwardness. The peasant woman stands shoulder to shoulder with the peasant [man]. She advances, together with him, the common cause of the development of our agriculture, its successes and its flourishing. She can make an enormous contribution in this cause if she frees herself of backwardness and ignorance. And the contrary is also the case: she could act as a brake on the whole cause if she remains a slave to ignorance in the future also. Women workers and peasants are free citizens on an equal footing with men workers and peasants. The women elect our Soviets and our co-operatives and can be elected to these organs. Women workers and peasants can improve our Soviets and cooperatives, strengthen and develop them if they are politically literate. Women workers and peasants can weaken and undermine these organizations if they are backward and ignorant. Finally, women workers and peasants are mothers who bring up our youth--the future of our country.¹⁴⁹

From this speech, it is important to see how Stalin mixed several issues regarding women's position. Stalin addressed to women as workers building industry; underlined their need to be educated to fight with ignorance (including peasant women's ignorance) put an emphasis on women's equality and their political participation as well as their status as mothers of future generations. So, it can be seen that Stalin, being against the ignorance of both peasant and worker women tried to make sure that their ignorance will be eliminated through their participation to work force, through political participation, and through education.

A similar speech was made at the International Communist Women's Day on March 8, 1925, when he listed the future ideals for the women as follows:

Ardent greetings to working women and women toilers throughout the world who are uniting in one common family of labour around the socialist proletariat. I wish them every success:

- 1) in strengthening the international ties of the workers of all countries and achieving the victory of the proletarian revolution;
- 2) in emancipating the backward sections of women toilers from intellectual and economic bondage to the bourgeoisie;

¹⁴⁹ Foreword By Pollitt, H. (1950). *Women and communism / selections from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

- 3) in uniting the peasant women around the proletariat—the leader of the revolution and of socialist construction;
- 4) in making the two sections of the oppressed masses, which are still unequal in status, a single army of fighters for the abolition of all inequality and of all oppression, for the victory of the proletariat, and for the building of a new, socialist society in our country.
Long live International Communist Women's Day!¹⁵⁰

In this speech, he again emphasized several different points such as unification of women from all countries, their emancipation from the bourgeois based backwardness, their union with the proletariat, and their major role in building a socialist society. At the 17th Party Congress, held between 26 January - 10 February 1934, Stalin would say the following:

women represent half the population of our country, they represent an enormous army of labor, and their mission is to bring up our children, our future generation, that is to say, our future. That is why we must not permit this huge army of toilers to remain in darkness and ignorance! That is why we must welcome the growing social activity of our toiling women and their promotion to leading posts, as an undoubted indication of the growth of our culture.¹⁵¹

Another theme regarding the woman question emphasized by Stalin was the success of the Soviet regime to realize women's emancipation. For instance, on the Article of the 122 of draft constitution of the Soviet Union in 1936, Stalin expressed the following views:

Women in the U.S.S.R. are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, government, cultural, political and other public activity. The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured by women being accorded an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by State protection of the interests of mother and child, State aid to mothers of large families and unmarried mothers,

¹⁵⁰ Stalin, J. V. (1954). *J. V. Stalin Works Volume 8*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, p.114. (2006 ed.)

¹⁵¹ Chatterjee, C. (2002). *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, p.157.

maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.¹⁵²

Stalin, in this speech, highlighted the success of the Soviet regime on women's equality in all spheres of life based on law. He underlined the regime's services to ensure women to freely exercise their rights. So, he emphasized the state-sponsored changes for women to be equal citizens, and glorified the Soviet Union to do so.

At the International Women's Day on March 8, 1949, he indicated that:

The gains of the Soviet system, the equality of rights of Soviet woman, her rapid spiritual and political growth, serve as an inspiring challenge to the women of the whole world in their struggle for the happiness of the working people, for the triumph of the ideas of socialism and democracy.”¹⁵³

Therefore, he underlined the characteristics of Soviet regime as a model to all the women in the world in terms of guaranteeing equality with men.

For Stalin, the Soviet regime also ensured economic independence for the Soviet women and as such emancipated her. For example, the work day system (*the trudoden*¹⁵⁴) made the *kolkhoz* women financially independent. As Stalin indicated:

Only collective farm life could have destroyed the inequality and put woman on her feet. ... The collective farm introduced the work-day. And what is the work-day? Before *trudoden* all are equal- men and women.

¹⁵² Foreword By Pollitt, H. (1950). *Women and communism / selections from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ On the collective farms in the 1930s a peasants' labour was measured according to the "work day" (*trudoden*), which was calculated according to task and to productivity rather than the numbers of days actually worked (Buckley, M. (2006). *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin's Fields*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, p.246).

Here neither father nor husband can reproach a woman with the fact that he is feeding her. Now if a woman works and has trudodni to her credit, she is her own master... and that is just what is meant by the emancipation of peasant women; that is just what is meant by the collective farm which makes the working woman the equal of every working man.¹⁵⁵

As can be understood from such speeches, in the era of Stalin, the woman problem was presented as taken care of. It was as if there was no more any question regarding their emancipation since the Soviet women had all the rights and opportunities to enjoy complete freedom and they had been fully participating in both social and political spheres. Stalin's era could be seen as the era of elimination of the debates regarding woman question. It was officially announced in 1930 that the woman question was solved in the Soviet Union. Although throughout the 1920s, oppression of women was frequently emphasized, the issue was dropped from the political agenda after 1930.¹⁵⁶

2.3.2. Economic Concerns

As emphasized above, in the Stalinist era, emancipation of women was no longer regarded as important for the survival of socialism. What Stalin did was to guarantee the equality between man and woman with the help of industrialization and collectivization.¹⁵⁷ Stalin would frequently indicate that the participation of

¹⁵⁵ Chatterjee, C. (2002). *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp.155-156.

¹⁵⁶ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.108.

¹⁵⁷ Collectivization is replacing private (peasants) discretion over the amount, composition, and marketed share of agriculture output with centralized administrative coercion ... supposed to have ensured the necessary increased flow of agricultural products to industry. (Millar, J. R. (1974). Mass Collectivization and the Contribution of Soviet Agriculture to the First Five-Year Plan: A Review Article. *Slavic Review*, 33 (4), p.750.)

the women into the labour force was the sign of their emancipation, so no other policies were needed. As such, he would mostly concentrate on the policies that would bring women into labour force and made them an important part of the industrial world. His passion for the growth of economy via industrial development affected all his policies, including the policies regarding women. Farnsworth argues that Stalin used every available political tool to achieve the mobilization of the society to that end. He did not specifically need women to work in the party, but he needed them to work in factories. To increase female labour force, Stalin promoted many policies to reduce the family duties of women.¹⁵⁸ In the first Five Year Plan put into effect in 1928, women's labor force was required for the survival of the system. As a result, women became more visible in factories where gender hierarchies were undercut. During the 1930s, women continued to be active in the labor force, although their roles as mothers and wives remained same. In other words, the shift of labor force from men to women would not be achieved in the domestic domain, and the sharing of household duties between men and women would not be realized. However, it must also be pointed out that despite this attitude, Stalin would also encourage women to have large families.¹⁵⁹ This conflicting demand on his part was based on the need for sustaining sufficient amount of workforce in the future that would guarantee the survival of the Soviet regime.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, the official discourse of the Stalin era emphasized that Soviet women, gaining their economic independence, had a dignified position in the

¹⁵⁸ Farnsworth, B. B. (1976). Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai. *The American Historical Review*, 81 (2), pp. 313-314.

¹⁵⁹ Shulman, E. (2008). *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.38-39.

¹⁶⁰ These conflictual policies regarding women's issues will be elaborated in the following chapter.

society as well as equality with men. This view would also be promoted in the media of these years.¹⁶¹ As Buckley indicates:

The dominant argument in the popular and academic literature of the 1930s and 1940s was that the revolution had guaranteed emancipation and equality. The general theme of the Stalin years was that “one of the outstanding achievements of the Great October Socialist Revolution is the complete liberation of women”. The message was that from the first day of Soviet power woman “stood shoulder to shoulder with her husband, father and brother in the struggle for a new enlightened life”(pravda, 8 March 1936). Women’s liberation was now narrowly conceived as part of the class struggle. Since the triumph of socialism meant that the class struggle had been resolved, it followed that the liberation of working women was assured.¹⁶²

However, in reality there were several problems regarding the issue of women’s emancipation. As Buckley argues:

Pictures and illustrations in Soviet books, magazines and newspapers showed smiling women confidently driving tractors and working in the factories. Women were mainly portrayed as economic resources rather than a category of human being striving for personal fulfillment through creative work and financial independence.¹⁶³

Although the propaganda mechanism at work throughout the Stalin years concentrated on the contribution of women in the process of implementing the industrialization and collectivization policies, Soviet policy makers did not give much attention to the real problems faced by women in both personal and socio-economic spheres of life. As Buckley states, “throughout the first decade of

¹⁶¹ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.123.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p.112.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* pp.114-115.

industrialization women were praised for their active and heroic role in the labour force, rather than for pursuing their own self-determination.”¹⁶⁴

2.3.3. Social Concerns

The woman question in the Stalin era was more about economic concerns than about transforming the status of women. However, the already existing family structures were hardly affected by the policies of Stalin.

The strengthening of the family was seen as the essential part of women’s emancipation. While in the 1920s, it was important to enact laws guaranteeing freedom of marriage and divorce, in the 1930s some laws that made divorce more difficult were passed for preserving the stability of the family.¹⁶⁵ It was assured that the stability in the home was required to ensure stability in the work place, and this would lead to further economic growth. As Buckley indicates, the purpose of Stalin was to create a strong economic base for the whole country.¹⁶⁶ Stalin, unlike Marx and Engels, narrowed down the conditions for the emancipation of women to the economic sphere.

Along with that, in the 1930s, family duties of the women as mothers and housewives were promoted. Stalin wanted to see women as the guardian of the patriarchal family who would keep their families together and to raise the future generations of the Soviet Union in a disciplined manner.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.113.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.109.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.110.

¹⁶⁷ Shulman, E. (2008). *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.13.

Shulman argues that, the ideology of Stalin was one-sided regarding sexes because it only tried to change the roles of women in the work place, but nothing was attempted to change the men's role in the household. It was claimed that:

in the mid-1930s women continued to work in the labor force, trained in a variety of sectors, and became dominant symbols of Soviet achievements in educating and liberating previously oppressed groups. Conflicting messages about women's autonomy and abilities versus their duties and special roles as mothers were difficult to reconcile in reality.¹⁶⁸

To conclude, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin established the foundation for an idealized world in which women would be part of the socialist revolution as well as the process of building a socialist society. While Marx and Engels focused mostly on the slave, serf, and server position of women under the capitalist system, they also indicated the oppression of women as if it was a class problem. So they approached the issue of creating more egalitarian family relations on the basis of investigating the conditions that would ensure self determination of all human beings. Lenin, however, focused mostly on the position of the women worker and peasant women in the society, and emphasized the importance of participation of all women into the revolutionary action, while attaching specific significance to legislation protecting women. Stalin, on the other hand, gave special importance to the backwardness and ignorance of women. During his regime, he no longer focused on the slave position of the women as a result of the official declaration that equality of women with men was achieved. His main concern was about bringing women into the labor force and to eliminate their backwardness and ignorance. So, there was a shift from the first ideals of the Soviet policy makers towards more economic based concerns. Addressing women as equal citizens and encouraging them to be a part of the political, economic and social spheres of life was seen as state-sponsored achievement in the Stalinist era.

¹⁶⁸ Shulman, E. (2008). *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.39.

His special focus on the participation of women to the labor force turned the attention away from other problems and new forms of oppression that women had to face. While Marx and Engels examined the oppressed position of women depending on the economic basis, Lenin and mostly Stalin promoted economic growth (depending on women's labour) that would eventually result in their emancipation.

The focuses of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin might be showing slight differences, but their concern for women remained the same. Peasant women and women workers were glorified and emphasized especially during the Stalin era in comparison to bourgeois women who were only referred as an opposite example of socialist women.

Therefore, regarding Yuval-Davis's five categories mentioned in the Introduction on how nation and gender are constructed by each other, one can argue that these four major figures all saw women as the biological reproduction of the nation; they all evaluated the status of the women within the framework of the relationship with the dominant groups and identified them with that; they all - sometimes implicitly- focused on the role of women in terms of cultural reproduction. It was, however, only Stalin who emphasized the importance of women in war time.

Having some idea about the basic framework of the Soviet ideology regarding women's emancipation would help us to understand what the Soviet policy makers actually did in practice in terms of actual policies promoted regarding the equality of women with men. The following chapter will specifically analyze the position of the Muslim women in Central Asia during the Soviet era. This analysis will be based on both the theoretical framework presented in this chapter, and on the real life conditions regarding the status of women in all spheres of life.

CHAPTER 3

3. PRE-SOVIET AND SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

This chapter discusses the everyday lives of Central Asian people before the Soviet regime and the changing life-styles of these people during the Soviet era in order to understand how the status of women in Central Asia had transformed. The aim is to understand both the traditions of this region in which Muslim women lived and the policies of Soviet regime on women's emancipation.

3.1. Everyday Life in Central Asia

Throughout the history, Central Asia had faced many invasions, and the region had been open to the impact coming from the outsiders. The region had its unique way of life shaped by the customs and religions. So, this dynamic characteristic of the region had both provided opportunities and resulted in destructions. The people living in this area experienced hope and disappointment at the same time. The everyday life has been shaped by many factors, mainly the geographical position of the region and its climate, nomadic and sedentary ways of life, and invasions changing the cultural heritage and religion. Although studying the historical developments of the region is not the main subject of this work, it is important to know the everyday lives and daily practices of the people living in that region to understand the changes that took place during both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

3.1.1. Geography and Climate

Central Asia is a landlocked region. Rashid points out that the region:

bordering Iran and Afghanistan to the south, China to the east, and Russia to the north and west. The vast Central Asian steppe is bounded by the Caspian Sea in the west, the Hindu Kush and the Pamir Mountain ranges in the south, and the Tian Shan Mountains in the west along the border with China.¹⁶⁹

As once Napoleon remarked, “geography is destiny.” This observation stands as a fact when examining the Central Asia. Due to its geographical position:

Central Asia frequently has been a way station, a barrier, or a buffer rather than a primary destination. For more than a thousand years its southern section marked the long and often hazardous middle passage of the Silk Road, the trade route connected the Chinese civilization of East Asia with the civilizations of the Mediterranean. Central Asia’s deserts and mountains, as well as its physical remoteness, constituted a rugged barrier beyond which great ancient and medieval empires could not expand. ... Central Asia has been a buffer zone between people and empires. In the 18th century, its northern grasslands separated the Russian and Chinese Empires. In the 19th century, it stood between the expanding Russia and British Empires.¹⁷⁰

In addition to the geographical position, climate also plays a role in the destiny of the region. Penck points out that:

The climate plays a principal role. Central Asia rises out of the arid parts of Inner Asia, but it is not a dry region in its whole extent. It gives origin to large rivers; most of them run into the surrounding deserts or desert-like countries. The Amu Darya and Sir Darya end

¹⁶⁹ Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad : the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.16.

¹⁷⁰ Kort, M. (2004). *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., pp.3-4.

in Lake Aral; the seven rivers of the Northern Tien Shan evaporate with the waters of Lake Balkhash; Lop Nor or its substitute is the terminal lake of the Tarim. Other rivers of Central Asia, the Hwang Ho and Yangtze Kiang, the Mekong and the Salween, the Brahmaputra and Indus, indeed reach the sea; this is due to the fact that they are not totally absorbed in those arid regions through which they pass.¹⁷¹

This separation of the arid and desert like land is an important factor for the settlement of the people in the region, as people had to arrange their living in accordance with the environmental conditions. Kort states that lack of rainfall and desert air makes the region really cold in the winter, and insufferably hot in the summer.¹⁷² Sahadeo and Zanca remark that due to harsh climate conditions and lack of sources, the people living in the region had to “arrange marriages and distribute labor and supplies; and defend against unwelcome incursions from outsiders.”¹⁷³ These needs brought the mutual accountability and support between the families, clans, villages, and tribes. To ensure their survival, risks, resources and rewards were shared by these people.¹⁷⁴ So, it can be argued that they had a common destiny. However, even in such an environment of sharing everything, some inequalities existed. As will be elaborated in the coming parts of this chapter, the patriarchal nature of the regional people “has led women to be highly valued but also tightly controlled...women, despite their important work, from

¹⁷¹ Penck, A. (1930). Central Asia. *The Geographical Journal*, 76(6), p.478.

¹⁷² Kort, M. (2004). *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., p.10.

¹⁷³ Sahadeo, J. & Zanca, R. (2007). *Communities: Introduction*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.34.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.33.

food preparation to animal care to planning of family budgets, have been isolated and subjugated in everyday life.”¹⁷⁵

3.1.2. Nomadic and Sedentary Way of Life

As a result of the geography and the climate of Central Asia, the people in the region had experienced nomadic and sedentary ways of life throughout the history. It has been stated that:

in broadest outline, the natural environments in Central Asia and Kazakhstan range from mountainous territory, intersected by fertile river valleys, through semi-arid steppe, to true desert. The corresponding economic and cultural types range from settled agriculture—either dry (bogara) or irrigated—through semi-nomadic mountain pasture pastoralism to true nomadic pastoralism of the steppe and desert.¹⁷⁶

Therefore, the basic relationship between the people living in the region was shaped through adaptation to the geographical and climatic conditions that affected their survival. Levi states that in the steppe, there were pastoral-nomadic people, and in the oases where the water sources were available, sedentary way of living was common. Nomadic people mostly migrated from one area to another to guarantee that their animals have access to adequate water and fresh pastures. On the other side, sedentary population engaged in agricultural activities. Therefore, as Levi labels, there was a symbiotic relationship between these people; while the sedentary population needed nomadic people for animals and animal supplies to

¹⁷⁵ Sahadeo, J. & Zanca, R. (2007). *Communities: Introduction*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.34.

¹⁷⁶ Dunn, S. P. & Dunn, E. (1967). Soviet Regime and Native Culture in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: The Major Peoples. *Current Anthropology*, 8 (3), p.148.

survive, nomadic people needed sedentary people for food items like wheat.¹⁷⁷ But, this symbiotic relationship did not always ensure peace between these people. As Levi points out:

Throughout the course of Central Asian history, it is a recurrent theme that wave upon wave of pastoral-nomadic peoples have periodically quit the steppe to take up residence in a neighboring sedentary society. Any of a number of factors in the everyday life of a nomadic people might precipitate these frequently violent migrants. These include: a rise in population pressures in the steppe brought about by naturally increasing populations and demands for grazing territory in times of plenty; shifting climatic patterns that periodically render entire portions of the steppe uninhabitable for years at a time; and, of course, displacement caused by migrations of other people from elsewhere. Additionally, events as unpredictable as a sudden freeze or an epidemic disease can devastate an entire herd, the sum of a tribe's wealth and the basis of their lives.¹⁷⁸

In addition to that, Abazov indicates that the relationship between the nomads and sedentary population was uneasy and complicated. He argues that:

The nomads regularly invaded cities and towns, taking the large booties and demanding subordination and regular tributes. Otherwise, they had little interest in becoming involved in the complex administrative, political, and economic developments of the sedentary centers. They were often satisfied with these arrangements and left administration and governance in the hands of sedentary bureaucrats and aristocrats."¹⁷⁹

So, there could be a symbiotic relationship between nomadic and sedentary populations in Central Asia, but their need for each other did not always result in coordination and balance. They continued to live their own lives only

¹⁷⁷ Levi, S. (2007). *Turks and Tajiks in the Central Asian History*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp.15-16.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.16.

¹⁷⁹ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.28.

sharing the goods and products, not destiny. Also, as Hiro points out, after the entrance of Islam into the region in the 7th century, tensions between the nomads and sedentary populations increased: the nomads continued traditional pagan practices, while the sedentary people were more willing to adapt Islamic practices.¹⁸⁰

Despite such differences and tensions, there were also certain commonalities among the nomadic and sedentary populations. As Massell states, “whether tribe- or village- oriented, whether nomadic or sedentary, local traditional societies were organized around kinship units in relatively self-sufficient communities, by and large along patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal lines.”¹⁸¹ Such a structure had a direct impact on how Central Asian women lived. As Massell continues: “among other things, this meant that male and female roles were, on the whole, sharply differentiated, though elements of ritualized female inferiority tended to be more pronounced in sedentary communities than in nomadic-pastoral ones.”¹⁸²

In the nomadic way of life, nomads had lived in the designed tents, namely *yurt*. A yurt could be erected within a few hours, and this was mostly the duty of the unveiled women. As Hiro indicates, “the interior wall of the yurt were insulated and decorated with a variety of ornamented items made of reeds, felt, and multicolored tassels and patterned braid, as well as colorful carpets – all made by the women of the family.”¹⁸³ So, this could be seen as the sign of the women’s

¹⁸⁰ Hiro, D. (2009). *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*. New York & London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., p.19.

¹⁸¹ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.6.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p.6.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p.22.

being identified with the home, and her being responsible for the household works.

Hiro, however, also states that the dresses of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz women were similar to the men:

they wore a shirt and trousers as undergarments. Sometimes, however, the shirt was long and tunic-shaped and served as a dress. Fashioned out of cotton fabric, the shirtdress was white, dark, or bright and variegated. Over the dress women wore sleeveless tunics extending down to the knees, with an open collar and a clasp at the belt. When venturing out of their yurts, women wore robes in summer and sheepskin overcoats in winter.¹⁸⁴

Also, Abazov argues about the nomads that:

women enjoyed more freedoms in their personal lives as a large part of the everyday economy very much depended on their contribution. Thus, women were not obliged to veil themselves, were not prohibited from communicating with representatives of the opposite sex, could travel, and were never locked behind tall walls, as there were simply no walls at all.¹⁸⁵

In general, it is possible to suggest that especially prior to the arrival of Islam, most women in Central Asia were unveiled and their dresses carried no specific religious meaning.

The everyday routines of nomadic Central Asian people mostly revolved around camps in which several families lived together. These families were really close to each other, and they were headed by the older males in the family. The nomadic way of life was perceived as a guarantee of independence. If there was an outside danger or threat, they just packed up their tents, and migrated to another area. They were really good horsemen and marksmen to protect

¹⁸⁴ Hiro, D. (2009). *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*. Newyork& London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., pp.22-23.

¹⁸⁵ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.217.

themselves from the enemies. Furthermore, they saw sedentary peasants as victimized and weak.¹⁸⁶ Large extended families' members were expected to help and support each other. As Edgar states:

if a member of a group is taken captive for ransom by an enemy tribe, his relatives are obligated to help pay the ransom. If family's livestock is stolen by marauding enemies, the group joins together to replace it. Murders are avenged by means of the blood feud, which requires the victim's relatives through the male line... to avenge the crime by killing either the murderer or a member of his family. In the society without police or courts, kinship mechanisms help to deter crime and to ensure a rough form of justice; without strong family support, however, an injured individual has no recourse.¹⁸⁷

As was the case for many nomadic families, several generations lived together in tents. In most cases however, this way of life had itself own discriminatory mechanisms. For example, among the Turkmen nomadic families, a young bride was not allowed to speak or eat when there were her husband's senior relatives; the end of her scarf had to be between her lips as a symbol of prohibition. Her marriage would be arranged -by her family who were the members of same tribe, and bride-wealth or bride-price was common.¹⁸⁸ A young woman was seen as a wife not just due to beauty and character, but also her ability as a homemaker. For this reason, "a young widow with housekeeping experience commands a large amount of bride-wealth than a virgin bride."¹⁸⁹ Women were expected to be engaged in household works such as taking down the tent, cooking,

¹⁸⁶ Edgar, A. (2007). *Everyday Life among the Turkmen Nomads*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.39.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp.39-40.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.41.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.42.

cleaning, making the clothes of the family, milking the animals, and caring for the children. Edgar points out that when they would give birth to sons, the life and status of women would improve. A son was seen more necessary than a daughter for the well being of the family because he was expected to take care of his parents in their old age, he was the one to bring wives and children to the family and he would protect his family from the domestic conflicts and outside threats. A daughter, however, was seen as a guest who would eventually move within another family.¹⁹⁰

3.1.3. Invasions throughout the History and Their Impact on Everyday Life

Various conquests that took place in the history of the region had a great influence on the lives of the people in Central Asia. Every empire, state, or civilization which conquered the region had left its impact on the region's history, and therefore on the culture, customs, and beliefs of the people. Abazov emphasizes that in the case of Central Asia, "there was never a single political entity that controlled the entire region in its present boundaries. Moreover, various parts of the Central Asian region were affiliated with different states, empires, or civilizations" ¹⁹¹ The history of Central Asia is dynamic, and the native population was open to outside influences.

Kort indicates that the history of the Central Asia can be traced back to 2,500 years ago. At that time, most of the people living in the region were nomads. These people spoke a language closer to present day Persian.¹⁹² Rashid

¹⁹⁰ Edgar, A. (2007). *Everyday Life among the Turkmen Nomads*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.42.

¹⁹¹ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.4.

¹⁹² Kort, M. (2004). *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., p.17.

labels the history of the region as a history of conquest. He begins this history with the conquest of the Persian Empire under Darius I around 500 B.C. Later, the Persians were attacked by the Turkic tribes from Siberia and Mongolia. Then Alexander the Great conquered Bactria and Sogdiana between 329 and 327 B.C. and he established the modern day city of Khujand. Between 300 and 140 B.C., the heirs of Alexander founded the Bactrian Empire and the western part of the region was ruled by the Parthians.¹⁹³ The south was controlled by the Greek-ruled states of Seleucid Kingdom which was later driven away by the Parthians.¹⁹⁴ In the last century B.C., the north of the region was conquered by the Sakas. The Kushan Empire, dating back to first and second centuries A.D., left its own traces behind. The empire allowed Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Hinduism to be practiced in Central Asia.¹⁹⁵ Levi points out that:

the Zoroastrian cultural heritage of Central Asia remains the ancient Persians' most apparent legacy in the region, and it has proven to be extraordinarily persistent among the descendants of the ancient Persians and also the Turkic Muslims of modern Central Asia.¹⁹⁶

Parthians and the Kushan Empire both collapsed in the 3rd century A.D. to be followed by the Sassanids which would be in power for about 400 years. The Huns reached the Volga River in the year 400, however left very little for the

¹⁹³ Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad : the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.20.

¹⁹⁴ Kort, M. (2004). *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., p.19.

¹⁹⁵ Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad : the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.20-21.

¹⁹⁶ Levi, S. (2007). *Turks and Tajiks in the Central Asian History*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.17.

cultures of the region.¹⁹⁷ The Turkic Gokturk Khanate entered the region in the 6th century, and by 552, it succeeded to control the territory from the Mongolia and China to the Aral Sea.¹⁹⁸ As Levi indicates:

In the ancient period, the nomadic peoples of the steppe were predominantly Iranian. ... In the middle of the fifth century, a confederation of Turkic tribes from around the eastern Altai Mountains moved westward and began to exert pressure on the various Iranian steppe nomadic groups. From the middle of the sixth century, as the Iranian groups migrated in large numbers into India, Turkic tribes replaced them as the dominant population of the pastoral-nomadic steppe.¹⁹⁹

The Arabs started to come to the region around 650, also with the aim of bringing Islam into the region. When the Arab army defeated the Chinese in 751 at Talas, it had opened the way to Islam to be established in the region. Independent Muslim kingdoms spread all over the oasis cities. The most important one was the Persian Samanids who regulated and expanded the Silk Road, spreading the Persian language and leaving behind the cultural heritage of Ibn Sina and Al Biruni.

Turkic tribes of Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids captured Khurasand and Bukhara in 999. Then Seljuks conquered Central Asia in the 11th century. In 1220, the Mongols under Cenghis Khan captured Bukhara. In the 14th century, Tamerlane founded the first indigenous empire in the region.²⁰⁰ So, as Rashid

¹⁹⁷ Kort, M. (2004). *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., p.20.

¹⁹⁸ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.26.

¹⁹⁹ Levi, S. (2007). *Turks and Tajiks in the Central Asian History*. In J. Sahadeo, R. Zanca *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp.18-19.

²⁰⁰ Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad : the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.21-22.

states “after almost four hundred years of Turkic rule, the region had become established as the center for Turkic influence in Central Asia and of resistance to Persian cultural and political domination.”²⁰¹ The Shaybani Uzbeks defeated the Timurids in 1500, but it would be divided first into small fiefdoms then to the khanates of Khiva and Kokand and Emirate of Bukhara in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Tsarist Russia realized its invasions in the period of 1865-1876, when Russian armies first captured Tashkent, and ruled the region until the Soviet Union was established.²⁰² Tsarist Russia did not have any intention to change the cultural patterns of Central Asia. Their aims were basically economic, administrative, and military.²⁰³ Khalid argues that:

The Russian conquest changed a great deal in the lives of Central Asians. They were incorporated into the broader imperial economy and made subject to new regimes of power. But the Russian state had neither the desire nor the capability to assimilate the indigenous population or bring about radical cultural change. In Central Asia, many administrative practices modeled on the colonial experience of other empires were put into effect that tended to maintain—and heighten—colonial difference. The protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva ... were left with internal autonomy, which tended to have a traditionalizing influence. In Turkestan, on the other hand, a two-tier system of administration took shape, in which the lowest level of administration continued to be staffed by local functionaries who worked in local languages. Judicial affairs too remained largely in local hands. Among the settled population, every county and every city neighborhood elected, indirectly, a judge (qazi)... [T]he state recognized the native population as different and institutionalized that difference in legal practice. The state was primarily concerned with

²⁰¹ Rashid, A. (2002). *Jihad : the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.23.

²⁰² *Ibid.* pp.23-24.

²⁰³ Dunn, S. P. & Dunn, E. (1967). Soviet Regime and Native Culture in Central Asia and Kazakhstan: The Major Peoples. *Current Anthropology*, 8 (3), p.148.

the maintenance of law and order, which would allow economic life to progress.²⁰⁴

Hiro indicates that when Tsarist Russia arrived to the region, there were many places such as Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand, Tashkent and Mari that were important centers of Islamic learning. Tsarist officials tried to not intervene into the traditional ways of life in these cities. Due to the centuries old nomadic way of life, most Central Asian Muslim men and women were illiterate, and due to practicing Islam, women were veiled especially in sedentary areas when Russians came to the region. People were living mostly according to traditional Islamic practices. Concoran-Nantes states that after the conversion of the Central Asian people to Islam, adat and Shariat laws became new guidelines of tradition for them. Especially among the sedentary populations, gender division was more apparent. In the Muslim patriarchal family, “control of the women by male kin, such as seclusion, the use of the veil (*parandja*), arranged marriages, polygamy and the payment of bride price (*kalym*)”²⁰⁵ were reported to be very common.

Abazov indicates that in the 19th and 20th century, women of Central Asia “lived in the most oppressive, conservative, and unfriendly environment to be found in the territory controlled by the Russian Empire.”²⁰⁶ They were being perceived as a property of their parents and husbands, arranged marriages were a very common practice:²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Khalid, A. (2006). Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective. *Slavic Review*, 65 (2), pp.236-237.

²⁰⁵ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women in Transition*. New York: Zed Books, p.35.

²⁰⁶ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.215.

²⁰⁷ However, on the other side of the picture, regional people did not accept the labels such as backwards or despotic to their way of life. They mostly blamed Westerns scholars to not to

Girls as young as 10 or 11 years old were pushed to become wives or concubines in the harems of wealthy men who might be the age of their grandfathers... Most of the women were secluded and isolated behind the high walls of individual houses or harems and never had an opportunity to get a proper education or job. In fact, a young bride entering a family often came under the full control of the mother-in-law or the oldest wife, who might force her to work for 12 or 14 hours a day on a farm or in the family's carpet, food processing, or catering business... Virginity and "reputation" were so jealously guarded that a woman could be stoned to death just for talking to or having a tete-a-tete meeting with a man other than her father, her male blood relatives, or her husband. Unmarried women were ostracized. A married woman was unable to leave even an abusive or paranoid husband. Dating was absolutely unacceptable, and almost all marriages were arranged by parents or matchmakers.²⁰⁸

Similarly, Hiro states that:

as ... [a] boy approached his late teens, his parents looked around for a potential wife for him, either directly or through intermediaries. The families of nubile daughters followed a similar approach. It was vital for both parties to ensure that the prospective groom or bride possessed unblemished character and that the young man had the wherewithal to support a family. In the case of a girl, virginity was a must. The next step was to determine the bride price to be paid in kind, often in the form of such domestic animals as goats, sheep, or cows.²⁰⁹

understand their traditions. They argued that their traditions were the sum of hundreds of years of experience, focusing on the communities and extended families, not on individual interests. The community was important to guarantee social safety in exchange for communal norms. So, such a norm, arranged marriages were needed to preserve social structure. Women had always had rights under the adat and Shariah law. (*Ibid.* pp.217-218).

²⁰⁸ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.216.

²⁰⁹ Hiro, D. (2009). *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran*. New York & London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., pp.28-29.

And, these kinds of patterns remained unchanged during the Tsarist era due to Russia's interest focusing mainly on economic activities rather than socio-cultural ones.

However, all these characteristics that defined the Central Asian region would dramatically change during the Soviet era and this new regime would have a direct impact on Central Asian women's lives as well.

3.2. The Soviet Regime

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) would be established with many new promises based on its own ideology (Marxism-Leninism) with the claim of creating the first communist regime in the world. The new Union tried to solve the economic, political and social problems inherited from the Tsarist era in order to establish a strong and indestructible socialist regime in the long run. Many legal regulations and propaganda tools were used for this purpose. In Central Asia, as elsewhere in the Union, the Soviets tried to establish a solid union economy, a strong state which would be egalitarian, atheist and secular, and to create new Soviet people sharing the same values regardless of their linguistic, cultural and traditional differences. In addition, the Soviet Union tried to change the traditional life style of Central Asian people.

In this context, women's emancipation was one of the main issues on the Soviet agenda. It can be suggested that the Bolsheviks tried to solve this issue by placing it within the economic and political arena. They strongly believed that they needed women to create and maintain a communist society. Ashwin claims that:

gender was always a key organizing principle of the Soviet system. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, the Communist Party attempted to transform traditional patterns of gender relations in order to consolidate its rule. The disruption of the existing gender system was both a potent

symbol of the triumph of the new regime and a means of undermining the social foundations of old order.²¹⁰

As analyzed earlier, women were assumed to be the mothers of the future communist generations, and the Soviet regime encouraged political and economic participation of women all over the Union regardless different characteristics of different regions. Both in the family and in the social, economic and political spheres of life outside home, women were expected to be modernized enough to make decisions based on their own free will. However, under the Soviet system, what a woman should or should not do were defined within strict boundaries according to the needs and priorities of a particular period of time. Therefore, while the Soviet regime sincerely tried to improve the position of women in the society, it also put them under heavy responsibilities and roles that could not be managed all the time. This would be more of a case for Central Asian women who now were stuck in between their traditional roles and the modernizing, secular outlook of the new era.

3.2.1. What kind of Proletariat was the Central Asian Woman

Goldman argues that “The construction of the Soviet working class cannot be understood apart from the deployment and contributions of women.”²¹¹ Similarly, Farnsworth claims that:

The Russian intelligentsia had long been absorbed with the problems of two oppressed groups: women and peasants. And as the relationship of the backward peasantry to the Bolshevik revolution underwent tortuous

²¹⁰ Ashwin, S. (2000). Introduction: *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London and Newyork: Routledge, p.1.

²¹¹ Women at the Gates Gender and Industry in Stalin’s Russia/ Reviews in History (2011). Retrieved December 18, 2011 from <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/315>

analysis, finally to become by the mid-twenties a source of bitter factionalism, the "woman question" seemed one of the few issues on which party leaders, Left and Right, agreed. When the regime was taking form, the woman question moved not in the direction of a socialist solution, but rather toward conversion to revolutionary myth. Only one leading Bolshevik, Aleksandra Kollontai, the central figure in the socialist woman's movement, fought single-mindedly for the socialist course. One is the assumption that the Russian socialists were, from prerevolutionary days, actively committed to working for the liberation of women. In fact, insofar as we can speak of a single attitude for so factionalized a group as the Social Democrats, the opposite was true. The liberation of women, part of the ideological equipment that the Russians inherited from a more humanistic, Western European tradition, was a concept they resisted adopting as a goal. It implied not simply equality for women but a union of women as a separate group, linked by bonds that transcended those of class. Therefore the Social Democrats preferred that the liberation of women be treated not as a specific, revolutionary goal but rather as an eventual result of the class struggle.²¹²

Therefore, one cannot understand the woman question without understanding the class struggle in the society, from the perspective of Soviet Union. Woman, as a part of struggle, was labeled as proletariat in Central Asia, in the absence of a real proletariat. Not all the scholars did agree about the type of the proletariat, but mostly all of them would see the woman as the lowest segment of the society.

Massell claims that one of the main stimuli for turning to Central Asian women as a potential revolutionary stratum undoubtedly was the growing Soviet awareness of the difficulties involving applying conventional criteria of class struggle in the Moslem traditional milieu.²¹³ He argues that, Soviet leaders had the intention to make women the strongest supporters of Soviet ideology, when

²¹² Farnsworth, B. B. (1976). Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai. *The American Historical Review*, 81 (2), pp.292-293.

²¹³ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.93.

the regime freed them from the sanctions of customs and transforming family structure. He insists that:

To turn from conventional categories of class struggle to the role of the family and its members meant to turn from macrocosmic perceptions of social revolution to microcosmic ones; from abstract to intimate and detailed preoccupations in social engineering; from settled notions of social process and action to research, experiment and improvisation; from class struggle to the novel, and unfamiliar, realms of sexual and generational tension, from a real proletariat to a surrogate for it.²¹⁴

Similar ideas were also put forward by Roy who indicates that in the absence of real proletariat, women became the “substitute proletariat.”²¹⁵

Edgar would disagree with them and points out that, from this perspective, women could only be the “supplementary proletariat”. Because, she insists that women were expected to support the Soviet regime to be emancipated, but the woman question was not the regime’s primary concern. Also, the main supporters of the regime were seen as poor peasants, not females.²¹⁶

In the absence of a real proletariat, gender relations and the struggle between men and women were overemphasized by the Soviet regime to create the conditions that Marx had drawn for the proletariat revolution. In other words, the revolution was tried to be stimulated on the basis of gender relations. However, one cannot deny the importance attached to men by the regime, and the absence of the women in politics. So, I think, women were the proletariat in the Central Asia, but they were not the main supporters of the regime, as Edgar points out.

²¹⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.93.

²¹⁵ Roy, O. (2000). *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*. New York and London: New York University Press, p.79.

²¹⁶ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.148.

3.2.2. Muslim Women in Central Asia under the Soviet Rule

An old Kyrgyz proverb claims that “a frog-headed [stupid] man is better than a golden-headed [intelligent] woman.”²¹⁷ The proverb indicates how women in Central Asia were seen in their societies. This was changed during the Soviet era because women were now seen as the visible participants of the revolution. The leaders of the Communist Party believed that women’s emancipation was the first step for the emancipation of all. In the 1920s, this issue was on the agenda of many state institutions. Some believed that women were the most oppressed section of the society, and it was not possible to emancipate everyone without first emancipating women. One way to mobilize the women was to make sure that they would see their enslavement to man and their being oppressed with patriarchal domination. Another way was to encourage the participation of women into the work force. Only with such measures could women develop their consciousness and be more powerful in society.²¹⁸

It was further suggested that gender policies were not all about achieving sexual equality, but also about solving the current demographic, economic and ideological problems that the Soviet Union had been faced with.²¹⁹ From the beginning of the Soviet rule, the leaders tried very hard to emancipate women from all regions of the country. The ideal was to equalize women with men in the economic, social and political spheres. To do so, the Soviet leaders provided

²¹⁷ Saidazimova, G. (2005). *Women & Power in Central Asia (Part 1): The Struggle For Equal Rights*. Retrieved November 1, 2011 from <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1064211.html>

²¹⁸ Koenker, D. P. (1995). Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Socialist Workplace. *The American Historical Review*, 100 (5), p.1439.

²¹⁹ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.186.

moral and material support for helping women in their roles of being mothers and wives. However, the aims of the Soviet Union regarding women's emancipation were challenged by different conditions in different regions of the Union. As Lubin indicates:

...female emancipation in European Russia was primarily a response to demographic, economic and revolutionary necessities; the idea of women's liberation itself was an outgrowth of attitudinal and social processes already under way between the sexes; and Soviet policies were mainly legalistic, for the most part involving changes in family and labor legislation. In the four Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Kirgizia, on the other hand, female emancipation marked a sharp departure from the social and economic norms of a deeply religious and traditional society. Women were veiled and secluded from all aspects of social, political or economic life; were slavishly bound to the duties of home and procreation; and in general were viewed, both by themselves and by others, as being by nature the lowest element of society.²²⁰

Especially in rural areas of Central Asia, women had no public role and enjoyed few rights. They had no right to divorce, for example. Under Islamic law, they had formal rights in theory, but in practice, it was difficult to enjoy these rights, if not impossible. The very first duty of the woman was childbearing, especially having large number of sons for the well-being of the family. Health care available to women was primitive, and since women were expected both to work and to give birth under these circumstances, infant mortality rates were very high, sometimes as high as 80% in some areas of Central Asia. Also, physical punishment of women was quite common. It was claimed that "a husband catching a runaway wife might bite off her nose, and the branding of genitals in cases of female infidelity was also discovered."²²¹ In one report of a Russian

²²⁰ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.182.

²²¹ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.94.

visitor to Central Asia, the following was indicated: “The woman within her family is considered a slave, her husband is the lord of all things, he decides everything and jeers at her.”²²² Furthermore, a woman from her early childhood years was taught to accept her subordinate place as a given and to obey the rules established by family and village commune.²²³ As such, Massell points out that the Central Asian women were perceived, and perceived themselves, as “the lowest of the low,” “the most oppressed of the oppressed,” “the most enslaved of the enslaved.”²²⁴

The Soviet Union therefore had to eliminate such a mentality to achieve its purposes. It was not possible to build a socialist state without emancipating women for Soviet leaders, so, the subordinate status of woman was tried to be eliminated by recruiting them into Soviet collective farms, factories, and schools. It was their major way to fight against the backwardness of Muslim women in Central Asia. Soviet authorities believed that while eradicating the old patriarchal customs and traditions, they could finally transform Central Asian women into modern and active Soviet citizens.²²⁵ To achieve this end, as Massell suggests, negative elements in the women’s life in Central Asia were overemphasized; the darkest consequences were displayed by Soviet authorities. Therefore,

²²² Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, pp.256-257.

²²³ Clements, B. E. (1982). Working-Class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution, 1917-1923. *Signs*, 8 (2), p.217.

²²⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.93.

²²⁵ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.132.

It was not a systematic analysis of native social values concerning female roles. Nor did it necessarily reflect the women's own awareness of life situation. It may be said that it was a vision engendered partly by reality and partly by necessity – and presented with a special purpose.²²⁶

So, one can suggest that in the very first years of the Bolshevik revolution, economic reasons responsible from the women's subordinate position in Central Asia would be emphasized, and other factors such as culture were not given much attention. However, the policies of Soviet officials would shift in accordance with their purposes and perceived necessities.

The crucial point is that the intention of emancipating women from all their burdens and responsibilities into which they were born did not necessarily end up in successful results. As Keller claims, for example, the Soviet policies for the emancipation of women in Uzbekistan had two components (which more or less, can be applied to other Central Asian countries as well):

The first was freeing women from Muslim social and religious structures. The second was moving large numbers of women into the new agricultural and industrial workforce. The liberation effort, while claiming to help Uzbek women, instead bound them in a terrible dilemma. Women found themselves caught between obeying the government, remaining loyal to their families, communities, and customs, and trying to realize their own desires in a bewildering sea of new opportunities. Ultimately, thousands of women became victims of the very forces claiming to help them.²²⁷

However, in order to understand the reasons of such contradictory results in terms of Soviet era policies regarding the emancipation of Central Asian women, it is first of all necessary to take a closer look at these policies. As such, the following section of the chapter will examine the women's status in Central

²²⁶ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp.94-95.

²²⁷ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.20.

Asia during the Soviet era by looking at the legal framework, socio-cultural area, economic area and political area.

3.2.2.1. Legal Framework

The Soviet regime, in order to eliminate the traditional way of life in Central Asia made visible and strong attacks on the existing legal system dominant in the region at the time. The initial steps taken for women's emancipation were promising. In 1918, the first family code, Civil Registration of Deaths, Births and Marriages, equalized women with men in front of law. The code allowed women to choose their surnames when they got married, gave the same legal rights to illegitimate children as legitimate ones, and eased the divorce process. Polygamy (polygyny), child marriage and bride wealth (bride price or *kalym*, *qalim*, *qalin*, *galing*) were banned. This code tried to achieve equality between husbands and wives by secularized marriage.²²⁸ As Buckley claims: "the code, among other things, abolished inferior position of women under the law."²²⁹ In 1919, the Registry of Births, Marriage and Death was established in Turkestan.²³⁰ However, the code did not respond well to the needs of peasants, and it "generated a good deal of conflict and resistance" among them as they "resented the imposition of a 'foreign' morality, and opposed the laws on divorce

²²⁸ Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.250.

²²⁹ Ashwin, S. (2000). Introduction: *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London and Newyork: Routledge, p.7.

²³⁰ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.39.

and alimony for clear economic reasons,²³¹ “presenting a deliberate challenge to the collective principle of the peasant household.”²³²

In 1920, Islamic law (shariat law), and Islamic court system were replaced with secular law and courts.²³³ The regime set an age limit of 18 for males, and 16 for girls to be married. The code put an end to the religious sanction of marriage and equality between man and woman was now guaranteed. Equal pay for equal work was legalized.²³⁴ Additional laws strengthening the personal safety of women were passed. Mistreating and insulting women were banned and forcing them to wear veil became illegal.²³⁵ In 1920, abortion was legalized. Women’s Bureau of Communist Party (*Zhenotdel*) was established in 1919.²³⁶ To enhance the female access to divorce via secular courts, a circular was issued in 1926 forbidding the religious courts to hear divorce cases. In 1927, the Uzbek commissariat of Justice issued a general call to form a “united front in the

²³¹ Ashwin, S. (2000). Introduction: *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London and Newyork: Routledge, p.7.

²³² *Ibid.* p.7.

²³³ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?, *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.604.

²³⁴ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.138.

²³⁵ Northrop, D. (2001). Subaltern Dialogues: Subversion and Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law. *Slavic Review*, 60 (1), pp.119-122.

²³⁶ Engel, B. A. (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.787. This organization will be analyzed in detail in the coming parts.

offensive against survivals of the old way of life for the emancipation of women, no doubt in connection with the launching of the unveiling campaigns.”²³⁷

Basically due to Stalin’s policy of combining economic independence of women with their family duties, 1936 Decree in Defence of Mother and Child became a historical turning point. In this decree, family, as the foundation of society, was emphasized. With this decree, abortion was illegalized, homosexuality was declared to be a crime, divorce became difficult to obtain and rights of illegitimate children were revised. Especially about the abortion issue, women experienced “horrors of illegal, unsanitary abortions in order to end unwanted pregnancies.”²³⁸ Another decree of protective labor legislation indicated that women should not work if this prevents their role as child bearers, and gave some special rights to pregnant women in the 1920s.²³⁹ It was assumed that financial support was needed for women to raise her children. This support was the key element of pronatalist campaign for large families. Also, visual material was used to emphasis the importance of motherhood and mothers. As Michaels points out, “photos and articles emphasized women's primary role as mothers and motherhood as the source of all happiness.”²⁴⁰ Central Asian republics passed laws identifying and outlawing “crimes of custom” (*bytorbytovyeprestupleniia*) in

²³⁷ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.23.

²³⁸ Michaels, P. A. (2001). Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban. *Feminist Studies*, 27 (2), p.308.

²³⁹ Evans, J. (1981). The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defence of Mother and Child'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (4), p.758.

²⁴⁰ Michaels, P. A. (2001). Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban. *Feminist Studies*, 27 (2), pp.320-323.

the 1920s.²⁴¹ Throughout the 1930s, the Communist Party propagated that the goal of women's emancipation was achieved.²⁴²

Rapid industrialization during Stalin's era drew women into factories. Soviet authorities believed that improved living conditions under communism would lead to an increase in the population; however, the consequences of economic and social policies were the opposite of what had been expected. The abortion rate increased due to women's being part of the labor force. In order to fight with this tendency, abortion was banned in 1936. In 1941, a decree on taxing single and childless citizens of the USSR tried to encourage birth. After the World War II, the pronatalist Family Law was put into effect. This law increased financial support for pregnant women, mothers with many children, and single mothers. Honorary title of Mother Heroine (awarded to those women with ten or more children) was introduced. This law was all about population expansion.

"Motherhood Medal" introduced in 1944 was Khrushchev's main proposal for population expansion. The Soviet regime aimed to encourage women to give birth to more children. As Nakachi explains:

In World War II, the Soviet Union went through an unprecedented demographic crisis. It lost 27 million soldiers and civilians, and the sex ratio imbalance deteriorated enormously. The average ratio of men and women of reproductive age reached as low as 19:100 in some rural areas. Furthermore, a large percentage of the Soviet population was dislocated by repeated mass mobilization, evacuation, deportation, and occupation. As a result, many families were broken up. The general reproductive health of

²⁴¹ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.133.

²⁴² Michaels, P. A. (2001). Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban. *Feminist Studies*, 27 (2), p.326. As Michaels suggests however, in the Post-war years, it would be stated that "a steady increase in the absolute number of abortions [is] an indication of the state's failure to reach women through pronatalist and anti-abortion propaganda."

men and women also deteriorated due to widespread venereal and gynecological diseases after the war.²⁴³

The proposal consisted of two documents; the informational note (*spravka*) “on measures for increasing the population of the USSR” and the draft *ukaz* (law) “on measures to increase governmental support for women in childbirth and mothers with many children, and reinforcement of the protection of motherhood and childhood.”²⁴⁴ Therefore, after Stalin’s period, the abortion issue was revised and divorce process became accessible again in 1955. The reason behind this decision was the increase in backstreet abortions threatening women’s health.²⁴⁵ In 1960s, the women question once again was on the agenda due to the rising concerns of declining birthrates.²⁴⁶ As Pascall and Manning point out, legislative actions of Soviet Union on women’s status had taken different forms as workers, partners, mothers, careers, and citizens, according to the needs of the time.²⁴⁷ Nevertheless under the Soviet regime, gender equality helped women to have certain access to resources and positions in economic and political life. As a

²⁴³ Nakachi, M. (2006). N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language. *East European Politics and Societies*, 20 (1), p.40.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp.40-47.

²⁴⁵ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press, p.139.

²⁴⁶ Engel, B. A. (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.788.

²⁴⁷ Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.260.

consequence of Soviet policies, in 1990s, about half of the workforce was composed of women, and the literacy rate was 99% for both men and women.²⁴⁸

To conclude, it can be suggested that the emancipation of women was imposed from above by the Soviet regime, mostly for the reason of creating revolutionary changes.²⁴⁹ However, in terms of implementation of emancipation policies in Central Asia, the major problem was the reluctance of local party officials to enforce the laws that were considered to be threats against their way of life and religion.²⁵⁰ Northrop claims that “the campaign to liberate Muslim women through law cannot be judged a mere success or failure; it played out in a manner that was neither simple nor straightforward.”²⁵¹ So, the laws initiated by the Soviet regime created mixed reactions within the society in terms of their implementation. In the following parts, these reactions will be further elaborated.

3.2.2.2. Socio-Cultural Area

In Central Asia, laws were not enough to guarantee women’s emancipation. The customs were internalized both by men and women in their traditional ways of life. It was difficult to cut the tie between women and customs. So, Soviet policy makers had to fight with the most visible characteristics of

²⁴⁸ Zellerer, E. & Vyortkin, D. (2004). Women's Grassroots Struggles for Empowerment in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 11 (3), pp.441-442.

²⁴⁹ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), pp.182-183.

²⁵⁰ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.41.

²⁵¹ Northrop, D. (2004). *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.244.

women in Central Asia, such as “preserving family honor, having smaller roles in public domain, being modest, and obeying their parents and husbands.”²⁵² As was emphasized earlier, for the traditional Central Asian societies “the son, ... meant the labor force. He was the one bringing wives and children to the family. He was expected to take care of his parents in their old age. However, a daughter meant a lost person when she married.”²⁵³ The only source of status and respect for women would be raising children.²⁵⁴ The inseparable part of Muslim women’s life, the *shariat* law was perceived as the protector of women and guarantor of their moral and spiritual position as mothers, wives, and daughters. However, the importance of religious law would change based on the nomadic and settled population’s life styles. The women in nomadic areas enjoyed more autonomy both in public and private spheres, as compared to women in settled areas.²⁵⁵ The division of labor and the tasks that women were handling gave them more freedom in rural areas, as compared to urban areas. Especially in the urban areas of the Central Asia, the women were not allowed to walk in the streets without male escort, when they did, they should keep their silence and segregation. As one Turkmen saying clearly portrays “the world is man’s house, while the house is a woman’s world.”²⁵⁶

²⁵² Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.135.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* p.135.

²⁵⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.108.

²⁵⁵ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, pp.36-37.

²⁵⁶ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.101.

The Soviet leaders attempted to eliminate such religious customs and practices that oppressed women. They believed that this was the very first step of establishing socialism, so they initiated reforms to eradicate the Islamic based marriage and family practices. As explained earlier, child marriage, bride wealth, and polygamy were outlawed to free women from the bondage of oppressive customs, and make visible them in the schools, collective farms, and mass organizations.²⁵⁷

As put forward by an expert:

The Bolsheviks viewed the extreme oppression of women as an indicator of the primitive level of the whole society, but their approach was based on materialism, not moralism. They understood that the fact that women were veiled and caged, bought and sold, was but the surface of the problem.²⁵⁸

The regime interpreted the commitment to the traditions due to illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition regarding the cultural roles of Central Asian women.²⁵⁹ However, as Abazov points out, the traditions in Central Asia were seen as the products of centuries old experiences. For example, the extended family structure was a matter of social safety. So, arranged marriages helped the survival of social stability while ensuring such safety.²⁶⁰ It was clear that the Soviet regime and Central Asian people did not look at the traditional way of life in the region from the same perspectives. The following example about the ban on

²⁵⁷ Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, pp.252-253.

²⁵⁸ Early Bolshevik Work Among Women of the Soviet East (1976). *Women and Revolution*(12). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/womendrev/oldsite/BOL-EAST.HTM>

²⁵⁹ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.157.

²⁶⁰ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics*. London: Greenwood Press, p.216.

bride wealth is interesting in terms of clarifying the views of Central Asian people back then:

As one peasant in Leninsk province said, “If the authorities want to ban galing [bride wealth], then let them prepare a place for girls [to live], and we'll send them there from the day of their birth.” Another declared, even more dramatically, that “from the day of their birth until the age of sixteen, girls are dependent on their parents. It's not possible to give them in marriage without receiving galing. If we have to give them away without galing, then our wives will kill their daughters at birth.”²⁶¹

There were, of course, some people in Central Asia who were welcoming the Soviet laws who were committed to the revolution and devoted their time and energy to spread the goals and ideology of the regime among Central Asian women. A Chuvash teacher and a writer, Nukhrat²⁶² was one of them, and she had stated that:

Kalym must go – a woman cannot be sold like cattle... Child marriages must be abolished – a woman is maimed by them. Polygamy must be rooted out – it humiliates a woman... Forced marriages... must cease – a woman is not a thing to be shunted by a master's will from hand to hand.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.141.

²⁶² “A talented Chuvash teacher and writer, raised first in a Moslem and then in a Russian milieu of Bashkiriia, passionately committed to the cause of secular revolution in Russia's traditional societies, and devoting all of her energies to organizational and propaganda work among Central Asian women.” Other women activists were listed as Krupskaja, Lenin's wife; Anna Aksentovich, organizer in *Zhenotdel* in Ferghana region; Yevstaliia Ross and Lidia Otmar-Shtein, political commissars in Red Army during the civil war working to organize Central Asian women in *Zhenotdel*; Serafima Liubimova and Nadezhda Kleiman, working in Central Asian *Zhenotdel*; Zinaida Prishchepchik and Yelizateva Popova, head of Uzbek and Kazakh *Zhenotdel*. Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp.133-134.

²⁶³ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.137.

However, despite such support, there were many murders and harassments against women due to these changes. In 1938-1939, bride wealth and underage marriages increased, sexual crimes and beatings of woman had grown. *Byt* (social, everyday life) crimes²⁶⁴ included murder, attempted murder, rape, underage marriage, and beatings.²⁶⁵ Underage marriages showed no sign of decreasing in the 1930s and 1940s. Local police officers and prosecutors were not willing to punish these crimes, and this resulted in the violations of law without any punishment. “Men arrested for insulting unveiled women could sometimes gain release in as little as two hours.”²⁶⁶ Moreover, child marriage was another problematic issue. Between the years 1925-1935, almost half of the social crimes were about child marriage. It can be argued that, Soviet policy makers failed to abolish the traditional practices. As early as mid-1940s, when anti-religious campaigns lost their impetus, mosque attendance increased and fasting in the month of Ramadan remained as widespread as before. Mullas proclaimed “a new era of freedom for Islam,” and “women who had gone unveiled donned the *paranja* once more.”²⁶⁷

Although the Central Asian woman was expected to work outside home and to participate into trade unions and social networks, she was also expected to

²⁶⁴ “By the late 1920s Soviet Central Asian authorities had passed a series of laws to address the problems posed by ... rituals. These laws established an important new category of criminal offenses: crimes of daily life, or *byt* crimes. They involved the definition of new norms for personal behavior and new legal templates to govern and shape patterns of everyday family life.” Northrop, D. (2004). *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.243.

²⁶⁵ Northrop, D. (2001). Subaltern Dialogues: Subversion and Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law. *Slavic Review*, 60 (1), p.126.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp.129-132.

²⁶⁷ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.31. Emphasis original.

handle household responsibilities and take care of her children.²⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the regime wanted to guarantee her emancipation, so the purpose of Soviet regime was double-edged. On the one hand, it aimed at elimination of religious based customs, on the other hand, a socialist system was tried to be achieved.²⁶⁹ As Keller points out for the Uzbek case:

Women had not been able to escape the vicious bind in which conflicting state and cultural demands put them. If they worked, they risked Uzbek male wrath on the grounds of either personal or cultural betrayal. If they did not work, the government could punish them as shirkers, which would hurt not only women but also their children. In any case, it is doubtful that most Uzbek women viewed the prospect of life in a textile or food-processing plant as truly liberating.²⁷⁰

From the perspective of local policy makers however, there were other criteria to be followed. As Northrop suggests:

... those organizations—such as the secret police and party Control Commissions—charged with ensuring the purity of Soviet ranks acquired a new set of (apparently) clear criteria for evaluating whether a person deserved a position of authority. If a man had only one wife, if she was of legal age and the wedding had not involved the exchange of bride price, if she wore no veil, and if she attended school or worked outside the home, then both she and her husband could be deemed loyal Soviet supporters. On the other side, however, using everyday life practices as leverage in politics expanded the disloyalty and resistance.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Evans, J. (1981). The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defence of Mother and Child'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (4), p.766.

²⁶⁹ Kandiyoti, D. &Azimova, N. (2004). The Communal and the Sacred: Women's Worlds of Ritual in Uzbekistan. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10 (2), p.329.

²⁷⁰ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.32.

²⁷¹ Northrop, D. (2000). Languages of Loyalty: Gender, Politics, and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan, 1927-41. *Russian Review*, 59 (2), pp.187-188.

In this framework, it would be appropriate to underline one of the very basic symbols of the everyday practices of Central Asian women, the veil. Kamp indicates that

Veiling meant wearing the paranji, an oversize robe with false sleeves, draped from the head to cover the whole body, and the chachvon, a black horse-hair net that also draped from the top of the head to cover the whole face and front of the body.²⁷²

Kamp expresses that for both men and women in Central Asia, veiling was proper to Islamic law and women showing her face to the men outside the family committed a sin.²⁷³ As one of the very basic tools of showing your commitment to your religion, veiling contained both traditional and moral meanings. The symbolic meanings attached to veiling came under the attack of Soviet officials who perceived the veil as the most important and visible obstacle for the emancipation of Central Asian women.

Therefore, the main campaign conducted in Central Asia was against veiling. Soviet leaders saw veil as the symbol of female inferiority, and veiled women were seen as the symbols of backwardness of Central Asia. According to Soviet officials, veiled women were prohibited from speaking to men, or were forced to spend their days at home only doing housework and taking care of children. This had to be changed. Therefore, in 1927, an attack on veiling started. This campaign was called *hujum*.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Kamp, M. (2002). Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2), p.270.

²⁷³ Kamp, M. (2006). *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, p.137.

²⁷⁴ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.132.

Hujum was not only about unveiling women, but also about eliminating many traditional practices such as bride-price and polygyny. Veiling was portrayed by the Soviet officials as a “socially dangerous,” “remnant of the past,” likely to “hinder the economic, political, and cultural growth of the republic.”²⁷⁵ The campaign against the veil also aimed at increasing the participation of women into the work force. Elimination of veil symbolized the conversion of Central Asian women to the Soviet way of life. The women would attend literacy classes and meetings, work in public sphere, and would be active in political life. Unveiling was believed to help the regime for social transformation.²⁷⁶

In 1926, Soviet organizations initiated ceremonies of public unveilings, and gave certificates to these women who unveiled. Central Asian Bureau declared goals of rapid transformation to enhance women’s social status by increasing their level of education and participation to labor force. Unveiling was used as a tool of these aims, in addition to the goal of achieving equal rights. For activist women, burning their veils would be the symbol of their transformation. It was a symbol of breaking ties with household chores and taking steps towards being educated, politically active, and emancipated.²⁷⁷ However, to undermine the oppressive gender relations in Muslim societies, and transform them into egalitarian relations, *hujum* became the “the spearhead of the assault on Muslim

²⁷⁵ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.139.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp.136-137.

²⁷⁷ Kamp, M. (2002). Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2), p.272.

societies.”²⁷⁸ The Soviet regime was mistaken to believe that Muslim women would welcome the Soviet-style emancipation.²⁷⁹

Hujum campaign officially began on 8 March 1927, the International Women’s Day. In this campaign, many women burned their veils in public arenas. Massell describes the event as follows:

On the morning of March 8, a massive outpouring of crowds of Moslem women was organized in major Uzbek cities. Led by *Zhenotdel* activists, and protected by police cordons, they marched in procession to especially designated city squares. ... In all cases, the squares were reportedly outfitted with large daises, and decorated with flowers, oriental carpets, red banners, and placards with revolutionary slogans concerning the liberation of women. Military bands and native orchestras were provided to greet the female processions upon their arrival in the squares.²⁸⁰

Zhenotdel leaders and other participants gave speeches and celebrated women’s emancipation. They accused Islamic customs for women’s backwardness and declared that emancipation of women would be achieved by communism. Then, veiled women tore off their veils, burned them and yelled revolutionary slogans on the streets.²⁸¹ In some cases, however, it was reported that these women who did not want to unveil in these unveiling ceremonies were

²⁷⁸ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.134.

²⁷⁹ Northrop, D. (2000). Languages of Loyalty: Gender, Politics, and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan, 1927-41. *Russian Review*, 59 (2), p.184.

²⁸⁰ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), pp.24-25.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.25.

threatened by political leaders, and party members. Some of these people would even pull women's veils off themselves.²⁸²

Unveiling had an interesting impact on the male party members. They had the chance to show their loyalty to the regime by unveiling their wives and daughters.²⁸³ Women choosing to unveil on their own were mostly the ones having the families where this idea was supported by males. Very few women decided to unveil due to the support to the new regime and its ideology.²⁸⁴

Another important point that needs to be emphasized is related to the attitude of the Muslim clergy in the region the majority of whom thought that unveiling was equal to prostitution. Many of these were arrested and accused of being against women's emancipation. Some of these people committed suicide to protest unveiling. Muslim clergy had developed its own reaction to the policies of Soviet Union. As pointed out by Keller:

When Communist Party officials set up *zhenotdels* in 1924 and 1925, the clergy fought back by organizing their own “*zhenotdels*”, which they dedicated to strengthening women's faith in Islam. When Communist propagandists gave impassioned speeches on Islamic misogyny, mullas established private classes in their homes for women, teaching them about the importance of the veil and other religious tenets. In many cases, the mullas' wives became active teaching women, in keeping with Muslim beliefs regarding sex-segregation. The message they enforced was that true Muslim women would not be seduced by Soviet blandishments, and that to remove their veils was to collaborate with the infidel rulers.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Kamp, M. (2006). *The New Woman in Uzbekistan : Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, p.171.

²⁸³ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), pp.136-137.

²⁸⁴ Kamp, M. (2006). *The New Woman in Uzbekistan : Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, p.148.

²⁸⁵ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.33.

The unveiling campaign resulted in violence against women, and cost thousands of lives. In February 1929, the newspaper *Uzbekistanskaipravda* wrote: “The murder of women has taken on a mass character. As of February 6, 70 people have been murdered. Social crimes are also taking place: qalim, giving girls in marriage, violence, rape of minors, etc.”²⁸⁶ Nantes-Corcoran states that only in Uzbekistan, 2.500 women were murdered in the following two years after the *hujum* campaign. Many women were assaulted.²⁸⁷ Keller argues that, the women did not want to walk unveiled in the streets due to harassment they experienced.²⁸⁸ This violence was an anomaly, involving spontaneous crimes of passion, initiated to terrorize other women. Murders were planned to restore the honor of women and intimidate others who were thinking of unveiling. Also, there was an intention to restore the social order. So, some women re-veiled for safety reasons.²⁸⁹ Many Muslims in the region interpreted the *hujum* campaign as a storm to punish or test the faith of the Muslim believers, not as the emancipatory campaign over women.²⁹⁰

Northrop differentiates three specific periods on the issue of veiling: first one is between the years 1927 and 1929 after *hujum*; the second one covers the

²⁸⁶ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.28.

²⁸⁷ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.47.

²⁸⁸ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.29.

²⁸⁹ Kamp, M. (2006). *The New Woman in Uzbekistan : Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp.187-201.

²⁹⁰ Northrop, D. (2004). *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.165.

years of 1936 and 1937 after the 1936 Family Law; and the third one taking place in the years 1940 and 1941. In the first period there are intensive attempts of the Soviet officials to unveil Muslim women, and how they faced abuse and harassment by men. In the second period, it was somehow accepted by the Soviet regime that pressuring women to unveil simply failed. In the third period, unveiling became popular and widespread again.²⁹¹

Exceptions in this picture were Turkmenistan and the nomad women in the other Central Asian countries. In Turkmenistan, veiling was absent. As Edgar points out, there was no *hujum* in Turkmenistan. Under these circumstances, party officials emphasized the legal reforms transforming family life. It was stated that “through the adoption of new laws outlawing traditional marital practices, they hoped to free Turkmen women from the constraints of custom and draw them into public life.”²⁹² Also, a majority of nomadic women was not affected from this movement, because most of them never veiled.²⁹³

Unveiling campaign was really important for the Soviet Union as a way to influence Central Asian women to be emancipated from their traditional burdens. It was a symbolic tool for realizing the policies of the regime. However, usage of this tool resulted in more resentment to the regime in the region.

²⁹¹ Northrop, D. (2004). *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.284.

²⁹² Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.133.

²⁹³ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.43.

3.2.2.2.1. Family

Women were treated as second class members in the family in Central Asia although they were the source of honor for the family. A woman had to be silent and obey the rules that her family and traditions dictated on her. Massell points out that “from cradle to grave, a Moslem woman was taught silence and obedience, and her total obedience was set against her husband’s unlimited and arbitrary power.”²⁹⁴ The relationship between a father and his daughter was very limited. Mostly, the father decided about the man whom his daughter would be married. As a Turkmen saying indicates “just as a cow does not choose the water she drinks so does a woman not choose her husband.” In the marriage, she was the object of the contract, rather than the subject.²⁹⁵ Bride wealth and polygamy were, of course, in the picture.

After the Bolshevik revolution, complete transformation of Central Asian societies was envisioned. Transforming family structure was an important part of it. Breaking up the old family structures and formation of new ones was the motto of the Soviet regime especially in the first decade.²⁹⁶ The Soviet Union, to achieve its end goal of transforming all society, tried to transform families in general, and mothers in particular. The distinct characteristics of the new regime was its opposition to the bourgeois ideal of “the angel in the home”, instead, the women were encouraged to work.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.121.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.111.

²⁹⁶ Alexandrova, V. (1946). The Soviet Family. *Russian Review*, 5 (2), p.76.

²⁹⁷ Engel, B. A. (1999). Women's Rights a la Russe. *Russian Review*, 58 (3), p.359.

As mentioned earlier, the 1918 Family Code gave the right to divorce to both women and men. However, this law was perceived by many Central Asian men as an assault to family.²⁹⁸ When women initiated divorce, they were murdered by their husbands, or eventually they committed suicide because nobody took care of them after the divorce.

Kandiyoti claims that motherhood was promoted as a social duty by the Soviet regime. As was explained above, by pronatalist and maternalist policies, Central Asian women especially in the rural areas were encouraged to give birth with the awards like Heroine Mother and Motherhood Glory (given to those with seven to nine children).²⁹⁹ It was predicted by some scholars that the status and rewards of motherhood would result in further differentiation between male and female roles in Central Asia.³⁰⁰

Likewise, Brezhnev approached the woman question in a rather traditional way and emphasized a woman's role of being a mother. In his era, the role of women as mothers of future generations was emphasized once again mainly due to demographic problems of these years.³⁰¹ As a result of women's having responsibilities both inside and outside home, birth rates started to fall. So, in the Brezhnev era, some precautions to prevent the demographic crises were taken,

²⁹⁸ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.144.

²⁹⁹ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?, *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.607.

³⁰⁰ Huber, J. (1979). Review: Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change. By Gail WarshofskyLapidus. *Social Forces*, 57 (4), pp. 1428-1429.

³⁰¹ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.179.

including “more provision of public dining rooms, kindergartens, creches, social services and household appliance.”³⁰² As an expert emphasizes:

public catering would reduce woman’s time spent shopping, preparing food and washing up, more up-to-date appliances, such as washing machines, would ease housework; an increase in the quantity and quality of kindergartens would reduce the demands of childcare.³⁰³

Also, the woman question was reemphasized in his era. As stated by an expert:

Brezhnev years allowed some further room for ideological maneuvering on the issue of women’s equality. It permitted a partial recasting of discussion of women’s positions in Soviet society that attempted to transcend the traditional roles of wife and mother.³⁰⁴

Under the Gorbachev era, the woman question was “rather open-ended; traditional lines on the need to strengthen the family co-exist[ed] alongside fresh pressures for more frank discussion of problems faced by women.”³⁰⁵ The party programme attached great responsibility to the state for the improving family care. So the importance of nuclear family with respect to healthcare and education of the future generations was emphasized in order to promote economic and social developments in the society and to improve birth rate.³⁰⁶ It was promoted during the Gorbachev era that:

³⁰² Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.168.

³⁰³ *Ibid.* p.168.

³⁰⁴ Ward, J. C. (2009). *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism*, United States of America: University of Pittsburgh Press, p.73.

³⁰⁵ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.195.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.197.

young people need preparation for family life and young families need protection. Priority should be given to the creation of work conditions and service provisions which enable women successfully to combine motherhood with active participation in the work-force.³⁰⁷

3.2.2.2.2. Education

When the Bolsheviks came to Central Asia, the literacy rate among women was only 2%.³⁰⁸ The reason why patriarchal relations were preserved in the region was connected to the illiteracy rate by the Soviets. In the 1920s, party activists going to the region reported the enslavement of women and the need to free them from patriarchal structures. These activists claimed that Muslim women were seen by the local people having neither the mind nor the need for education.³⁰⁹ Moreover, women could not be teachers, both due to their lack of education and customary laws.³¹⁰ The only education that Central Asian women could get was religious education. It was suggested that “the implementation of the Soviet regime of education, replacing that of religious education through the *madrasahs* and *maktabs*”³¹¹ had faced some resistance by local people. This resistance was based on the fact that “education for Muslims was based on religious instruction

³⁰⁷ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.197.

³⁰⁸ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.93.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp.93-94.

³¹⁰ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.106.

³¹¹ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.65.

and the secular Soviet system was believed by parents to be anti-education, ... and Muslim families were opposed to principle of co-education.”³¹² Therefore, in the 1920s, many families refused to send their girls to schools, so the Soviet policy makers initiated an education programme for girls separate from the boys during the first seven years of schooling, and “only after 1930, ... primary education was made compulsory for both boys and girls.”³¹³ State-sponsored education throughout the Soviet Union was a great opportunity for women to get an education and become professionals in the areas formerly occupied by men. The expectation was that, when women were educated, they could have competed with men in every sphere of life.³¹⁴

Under the Soviet system, equal educational access for all children was guaranteed by law. Schooling was organized to prepare both boys and girls for their future roles. The new schooling system would be functional to “educate boys to be future fathers and courageous fighters for the socialist homeland and girls to be the conscious mothers and educators of the new generation.”³¹⁵ Soviet policy makers promoted female education and set quotas for female students at universities and institutions. Literacy classes were opened and men refusing to send their wives and daughters were prosecuted.³¹⁶

³¹² Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.65.

³¹³ *Ibid.* pp.65-66.

³¹⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.98.

³¹⁵ Ewing, E. T. (2006). 1954–The Repudiation of Single-Sex Education: Boys' Schools in the Soviet Union, 1943. *American Educational Research Association*, 43 (4), p.625.

³¹⁶ Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, pp.259-260.

In the most urbanized region, Uzbekistan, 120 schools for literacy were opened. However, it was difficult to maintain educational tasks for nomadic women. *Zhenotdel* officials encouraged nomadic women to settle in the nearest town to get education. Women would stay there from two weeks to six months, and attended literacy classes and got educated about politics and childbearing.³¹⁷ In the 1930s, the results of such educational activities would be taken, as the first generation of female lawyers, doctors, scientists, and professors emerged. However, until the Second World War, women could not start to work in the fields of heavy industry and construction, which were perceived to be male domain. Nevertheless, the shortage of male workers due to war conditions necessitated women to be employed and educated in these fields.³¹⁸

Under Khrushchev, “the Muslim practice of removing young girls from the education system at a very young age, often resulting in schools having male pupils only” was given attention.³¹⁹ In 1960s, mixed schools were common thing. The women here both learned and engaged in sports (volleyball, basketball, and hiking).³²⁰

As Keller indicates, education of women created social tension. In theory, Muslim law did not forbid women from getting an education, but in reality, literate women were very rare in Central Asia. However, both the Muslim clergy and most parents resented the secular schools of Soviet the Union. As an example

³¹⁷ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, p.52.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.66.

³¹⁹ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.145.

³²⁰ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics*. London: Greenwood Press, p.221.

of this tension, Keller states that “when the Soviet government introduced the law on:

General Compulsory Primary Education” in Turkmenistan in 1930, local peasants were outraged that schools educated girls as well as boys. In 1931, peasants set schools on fire in many districts of Turkmenistan, and the project proved to be largely a failure.³²¹

Nevertheless, despite all the negative attitudes, almost all women were literate in Central Asia at the eve of the collapse of Soviet Union.

3.2.2.2.3. Art

Prior to 1920, very few images of women were used for visual propaganda. In visual arts especially in paintings or posters, women were not presented as the heroic figures; rather they were portrayed as allegorical figures symbolizing freedom, liberty, or history.³²² The Soviet regime used female presence in the figures to indicate the hierarchal relationship between genders. These images were about the domination of men and subordination of women for the purposes of justifying policies to emancipate them. Bonnell indicates that “The transformation of female imagery corresponded to the ascendancy of a new Bolshevik visual language which gave expression to the party's conception of collective identities based on class and gender.”³²³

By mid-1930s, while the need for women work force increased, heroic women figures became the part of the Soviet press. These heroes did not

³²¹ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.35.

³²² Bonnell, V. E. (1991). The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Political Art. *Russian Review*, 50 (3), p.269.

³²³ *Ibid.* p.270.

necessarily fight at the war, but they were the winners of the battle against the backwardness and subordination of women.³²⁴ The glorification of female martyrs represented the Soviet policy of promoting communism in the name of defense of motherhood and homeland. In other words, “While drawing on pre-war hero cults that made women emblems of revolutionary transformation, the cults of Soviet war heroes also relied on veiled religious references and on traditional ‘clichés’ about duty, masculinity, honor.”³²⁵ Therefore, as the policies of the regime evolved and changed, the representation of women in visual arts also changed.

3.2.2.3. Economic Area

In Central Asia, in the pre-revolutionary years, as a result of the traditional way of life women were not allowed to work outside. Husbands and fathers did not allow their wives or daughters to work outside the home due to their potential contact with other men. Although women were working in the fields, carrying water, processing wool to make clothes, cooking, and raising the children, they did not have direct face-to-face contact with men while carrying out these traditional duties.³²⁶ There were few or no remuneration of their work, so they were dependent on men economically, as they were not allowed to sell what they produced.³²⁷ In addition to that, bride wealth also made woman dependent on men economically. She was perceived as the property of the father and/or the husband

³²⁴ Kirschenbaum, L. A. & Wingfield, N. M. (2009). Gender and the Construction of Wartime Heroism in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. *European History Quarterly*, 39 (3), p.468.

³²⁵ *Ibid.* p.483.

³²⁶ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.98.

³²⁷ *Ibid.* p.100.

and was believed to have no need for economic independence. As Massell points out:

To endow women with opportunities for choice in personal matters and with equal rights in economic domain is to disorient and weaken prevailing concepts of property in a traditional Islamic system. A revolutionary regime can bring about such weakness and disorientation by bringing into question the woman's role as her father's means of exchange, and her husband's beast of burden, chattel, and property in marriage; and by forcefully stressing and challenging the entire range of her legal and customary inferiority, particularly with respect to her control and inheritance of property, including land. As a corollary, engineered incoherence in concepts and relations concerning property compounds the power of the regime's pull upon poor and socially disadvantaged males. It has this affect because it affords the opportunity to stress a new availability of brides that is no longer dependent on the social status of man and his family or clan or on the requirements of property in the form of the traditional bride-price (Kalym).³²⁸

However, this traditional structure would be forced to change and women would become visible when the Soviet regime established certain sets of rules to guarantee women's place in labor market. Under the new system, the women were promised equal pay, equal opportunities, and sanctions to prevent gender discrimination at work. They were now protected by laws. It was promising to see Central Asian women in labor force although higher rank positions were held mostly by men.³²⁹

Women became a very important part of the Soviet labor force in the 1930s. Unlike their Western encounters, however, their being part of the economic area was not because of capitalism, rather it was the success of rapid

³²⁸ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.160.

³²⁹ Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.248.

industrialization and development to construct a socialist system.³³⁰ Furthermore, the Soviets introduced collectivization to establish an agricultural sector without individual smallholdings, private property, and private ownership of means of production. The desired result was the creation of the state farm, the cooperative, and the commune as the basic units of production. Collectivization was expected to positively affect the women, because it would destroy the traditional patriarchal model in which women had no independent economic existence. Also, in collective farms, women would be registered into the system directly and their work would give them economic independence.³³¹

Women's participation to labor force was further guaranteed with child care services. High levels of female labor participation could be achieved, if women would be free to spend their time at work without any worries for household duties and childcare.³³² As Croll indicates:

Not only was paid labor seen to benefit women economically, but a direct correlation was also predicted between women's entry into the labor force and the degree of their participation in its controls and in the distribution of the fruits of production.³³³

Croll, also, argues that:

the experience of the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba demonstrates that ideological beliefs based on women's supposed inferiority and the sexual

³³⁰ Randall, A. E. (2004). Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s. *Journal of Social History*, 37 (4), p.965.

³³¹ Croll, E. J. (1981). Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences. *Signs*, 7 (2), p.362.

³³² Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Solicy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.245.

³³³ Croll, E. J. (1981). Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences. *Signs*, 7 (2), p.364.

division of labor can survive quite radical changes in the relations of production and in the material circumstances of women.³³⁴

As mentioned in the previous chapters, another important turning point for the empowerment of women was seen during the Stalinist era. In this era, the Soviet Union had been trying to achieve economic independence, and there was the need to expand the labor force. So:

in terms of economic security, women were ... important to the well-being of the state. The costs of the inclusion of women into the workforce actually demonstrated that the demands of the economic security of the state can be at variance with the wellbeing of individuals.³³⁵

One major rather negative development regarding the empowerment of women was experienced in 1928. Under the New Economic Plan (NEP), labor conscription was ended, unemployment rose, and women had difficulties to find a job and dependency of women on men increased. Around the same time, the government reduced child care support. NEP had catastrophic effects on women.³³⁶ The five-year plan for rapid industrialization starting with 1928 also had affected women's status negatively. The social services and industries helping women to liberate themselves from traditional customs were reduced. *Zhenotdel* was resolved, in order to prevent women's protest against the industrialization process which hit hard on them. Although the first five-year plan promised to emancipate the women by ensuring their participation to paid labor, in 1929 and 1930, female unemployment increased. This "was a direct result of the investment

³³⁴ Croll, E. J. (1981). Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences. *Signs*, 7 (2), p.370.

³³⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.96.

³³⁶ Farnsworth, B. B. (1976). Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai. *The American Historical Review*, 81 (2), p.300.

priorities of the plan, which, by emphasizing heavy industries, led to lay-offs in the light industries employing the highest percentages of women workers.”³³⁷

Labor shortage due to the “declining family size”³³⁸ once again resulted in a policy shift in Brezhnev’s era. Buckley indicates that:

for the requirements of the Soviet economy to be met, an answer had to be provided to the question of how women could combine their roles in production and reproduction without neglecting either role, simultaneously increase their efficiency in the work-force and also bear children.³³⁹

Soviet economists called for a detailed analysis to find a solution to the decline in the economic growth rate with the rational use of resources. As women workers constituted half of the workers, detailed investigations about their lives were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s to organize them at the direction of Soviet policies.³⁴⁰ However, these investigations were held to reduce the double burden that women had to bear for the sake of women’s contribution to the economic area, not for the sake of their emancipation. So, under Brezhnev, concerns about productivity and labor supply resulted in decreased interest on women’s emancipation. The basic needs in this era were to find solutions to the problem of declining production rates, so women had to be encouraged to work outside home with several initiatives. Therefore, in Brezhnev’s years:

scrutiny of the supply of kindergartens, creches and public dining rooms were prompted, not out of a concern to establish whether the preconditions

³³⁷ Schrand, T. G. (1999). The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51 (8), p.1455.

³³⁸ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.164.

³³⁹ *Ibid.* p.165.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.166.

of female self-determination were present, but by an interest in encouraging reproduction.³⁴¹

After Brezhnev, Gorbachev had several policies regarding women's issues which basically revolved around providing "general support for the combination of motherhood with participation in the work-force; ... [and] increasing opportunities for part-time work."³⁴² Discussions about the problems faced by women at the work place were deepened in this era. Due to the need for economic productivity and its relevance to the women's participation to labor force, the working conditions and the needs of women in work places were given importance in this era.³⁴³ As an example, at the 1987 All-Union Conference of Women, it was suggested that:

Women were not moving into mechanized work because machines and equipment, such as tractors and machinery in factories, were designed for men, not women: 'It is paradoxical, but a fact: institutions and organizations responsible for the production of new technology gear themselves only to the average working men' (*Izvestiia*, 1 February 1987).³⁴⁴

Gorbachev initiated two major policies: *perestroika* and *glasnost*. *Perestroika* meant reconstruction, and *glasnost* meant openness. The first one referred to "'radical', 'revolutionary' and 'serious' changes in Soviet economies, politics, and society"³⁴⁵ and the second one aimed at "the imparting of

³⁴¹ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp.187-188.

³⁴² *Ibid.* p.191.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* p.191.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.202.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.192.

information, honesty in reporting and more general cultural changes.”³⁴⁶ So, with the *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the quality of women’s lives was further investigated and “domestic division of labor, harsh working conditions and the absence of women from top jobs” are underlined.³⁴⁷ In the late 1980s, it was stated that the party policy “encourages women to bear and rear children, if they so wish, but also backs women who seek promotion through work.”³⁴⁸

Therefore, open and more detailed investigations about the participation of women into workforce was tried to be achieved in this era, not just for promoting the successes of Soviet regime, but also to reevaluate and reform it.

Women had been visible in all spheres of life. In Uzbekistan, for example, women constituted 50% of those employed by government. 45% of local deputies were women. However, one should not forget that women mostly occupied the lower skilled jobs.³⁴⁹

Lubin claims that the main reason for the emancipation of women in Central Asia was the ideological in nature. While increasing their participation in the labor force and in the public sphere, the Soviet regime aimed that people would start to establish smaller families. This meant that they would be concerned less about domestic affairs, and economic independence of women would lead to the construction of Soviet ideals and values.³⁵⁰ However, as demographic

³⁴⁶ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.193.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.194.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.196.

³⁴⁹ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.100.

³⁵⁰ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.187.

concerns increased due to war casualties and smaller families, the need for the socialist future generations guaranteeing the survival of the regime became more important for the Soviet officials, and the policies towards this initiative were emphasized.

3.2.2.3.1. Double Burden

Since the 1930s, women were engaged in both full-time waged labor and household chores. Especially in the urban areas, they had to carry heavier responsibilities both in the public and private spheres. Since the 1960s, the role of women as mothers had been more emphasized. The claim was that women were different than men biologically, so it was natural for women to embrace motherhood roles.³⁵¹ Child bearing was perceived as the natural role of women. Soviet authorities explained this attitude with the female qualities of being sensitive, delicate, and nurturing.³⁵² Such attempts to make woman a part of labor force, and making them responsible from household work and child bearing eventually resulted in “double burden.”³⁵³ They had to work outside the home, and also had to take care of the house work without labor saving devices. In addition they had to spend long hours in food lines. When policies to increase birth rate were added to the picture, this burden became an undeniable fact.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Engel, B. A. (1992). Engendering Russia's History: Women in Post-Emancipation Russia and the Soviet Union. *Slavic Review*, 51 (2), pp.319-320.

³⁵² Engel, B. A. (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.789.

³⁵³ Schrand, T. G. (1999). The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51 (8), p.1456.

³⁵⁴ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.92.

Other aspects such as inequalities in work place in terms of wage and status, and limited support given to child bearing services that failed in most cases to meet the needs of women workers had made the burden even heavier. As Benería and Sen point out:

The tensions raised by women's dual responsibilities in work inside and outside the home are compounded in the Soviet Union and parts of Eastern Europe by the efforts of the state to make women bear more children. Women are seen as essential to the pace of development in both the roles of workers and child-bearers, and yet there is an unwillingness on the part of the state to increase funds for support services for child care or other domestic work.³⁵⁵

Therefore, women were tried to be emancipated from being subordinate to men, and socialist family was attempted to be formed, however, the regime put an emphasis on the natural responsibilities of women which created both double burden and confusion in women's mind.³⁵⁶ Some authors such as Einhorn (1993), Lafont (2001), and Zellerer and Vyortkin (2004) further argue that one should consider triple burden in Soviet Union. The women not only were expected to take care of household responsibilities and being part of labor force, but also they were encouraged to be politically active within the framework of Soviet ideology.³⁵⁷ So, there was a problem of double or triple burden, despite various measures taken by the regime. Therefore, further solutions "to alleviate the burdens of domesticity, to improve public services, mechanize housework, and

³⁵⁵ Benería, L. & Sen, G. (1982). Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Role in Economic Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications. *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1), p.172.

³⁵⁶ Pollert, A. (2003). Women, Work and Equal Opportunities in Post-Communist Transition. *Work, Employment & Society*, 17 (2), p.333.

³⁵⁷ Zellerer, E. & Vyortkin, D. (2004). Women's Grassroots Struggles for Empowerment in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 11 (3), p.442.

upgrade and expand daycare”³⁵⁸ were necessary. Furthermore, in order to advance women at the workplace, “better preparation for young women and on-the-job training for women who have lost skills as a result of maternity leaves”³⁵⁹ had to be realized. Also, the Soviets took steps to reduce expectations from women on labor force such as fewer labor days and hours for women. However, this created discrimination and financially harmed women.³⁶⁰ Another solution, the informal one, developed by the women themselves, was sharing of responsibilities with other women of the same household, kinship, or village. In this way, women helped to carry out each other’s’ burden.³⁶¹ Soviet planners and academicians gave some advice to the Soviet authorities to help handling the double burden. These suggestions were;

building of more kindergartens and nurseries, a shorter working day for women, and a rise in the level of goods and services so as to free more women from the home for the labor force...expansion of particularly those sectors of the economy which attract largely women-e.g., textiles, parts of the food industry, or animal husbandry- and mechanization of existing plants and factories in these sectors in order to reduce the number of female manual workers...raising the educational level of women in every sector, and on increasing the opportunities for their further political and social participation.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Engel, B. A. (1987). Women in Russia and the Soviet Union. *Signs*, 12 (4), p.795.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.795.

³⁶⁰ Croll, E. J. (1981). Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences. *Signs*, 7 (2), p.367.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.368.

³⁶² Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), pp.198-199.

It must finally be mentioned however that despite the initial intentions about Central Asian women's participation in the labor force, the end result was not exactly as expected. As an article published in *Soviet Uzbekistan Today* in 1979 claimed: "for the first time in human history socialism has provided women with equal rights with men irrespective of nationality and faith, and opened to them broad opportunities for the development of their talent."³⁶³

However, women in Central Asia are still far from having achieved complete parity with men due to unskilled position, no growing in the numbers of working women, overrepresented in manual and lower skilled jobs, and Slavic women being tend to dominate the higher skilled positions.³⁶⁴

3.2.2.4. Political area

Massell claims that in Central Asia, women were believed to have little reliability than men, if they had any. Moreover, they were seen dangerous due to their potential to consort with the devil. If there was a man, there was no need for a woman. So, women were not welcomed in politics by native men, as they were believed to have limited capacity to make decisions without the consent of a male. Therefore, they were not seen sufficient to handle politics.³⁶⁵ Women were seen as emotional beings with strong feelings of motherhood which would make them unfit for making objective and rational decisions that are required in politics.

³⁶³ Lubin, N. (1981). *Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions*. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.183.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp.183-184.

³⁶⁵ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp.102-105.

As explained earlier, during Stalin's era, the main policies regarding the women question was formulated by economic concerns in mind, specifically about how to draw women into the work force.³⁶⁶ With the official declaration of success of women's emancipation, the Soviet officials focused on the industrialization process and women's role in it. So they did not pay much attention to women's political participation.

Khrushchev tried to de-Stalinize the Soviet system and underlined the lack of women in politics. He claimed that:

it should not be overlooked that many party and state organs put women forward for leadership posts with timidity. Very few women hold leading posts in the party and soviets, particularly among part committee secretaries, chairpersons of Soviet executive committees, and among directors of industrial enterprises, collective farms, machine tractor stations and state farms.³⁶⁷

In his reign, Soviet policy makers and women's departments had spent time to analyze the women's lives and to solve the problems that women faced when they entered into politics.³⁶⁸ In this era, positive discrimination practices were initiated to include more women into the political scene.³⁶⁹ A quota was set to ensure the representation of women in the parliament. It was between 23% and 30% of the parliamentary seats, and some posts were guaranteed in unions and organizations. However, in reality, women continued to remain excluded from the

³⁶⁶ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.110.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.140.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.146.

³⁶⁹ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics*. London: Greenwood Press, p.221.

political arena. In the 1960s, and 1970s, fewer than 4% of urban and district party secretaries were women.³⁷⁰

Under Brezhnev, once again priority has been given to the economic reforms regarding women rather than political concerns. It was argued that:

in the 1970s it became popular to argue that political equality was one element of factual equality and that the extent of women's participation in politics 'depends on the level of development of the social organism in general', on the character of economic relations and the level of consciousness of the working people.³⁷¹

Under Gorbachev's rule, the argument that the women question was solved was denied and women were pushed to be more active in political scene. Women's representation in the governing bodies was emphasized while the hardships that prevented women from entering into the political arena were analyzed.³⁷²

Coming to Central Asia, in mid-1920s, the Communist Party established Turkistan Communist Party's Women's Division in Tashkent. Turkestani delegates were invited to attend the conference in Moscow for the Women of the East. The Division in Turkistan tried to convince the Central Asian women to elect delegates for this conference. Some elected delegates had to run away from their families to attend the conference, because they were not allowed traveling alone. When they reached Tashkent, they learned that the conference was cancelled. However, the women continued their journey to Moscow. They attended the Second International Congress of Communist Women, but only as participants, not as delegates. The Russian-language journal *Kommunistka*

³⁷⁰ Pollert, A. (2003). Women, Work and Equal Opportunities in Post-Communist Transition. *Work, Employment & Society*, 17 (2), p.334.

³⁷¹ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.177.

³⁷² *Ibid.* p.199.

reported that “The visitors' exotic garb, their veils and their unveiling, and their halting speeches received notice, but the Eastern women themselves went nameless.”³⁷³ Therefore, this conference was seen as an example of how Central Asian women could dedicate themselves to politics, if given a chance by Soviet officials. They could be the leading force in political arena, if their potential could be better used as a tool for Soviet policy makers. To give a voice to women, they were given the right to vote in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in 1924,³⁷⁴ in Turkmenistan in 1927, in Uzbekistan in 1938 and in Kyrgyzstan in 1918.³⁷⁵

To overcome the traditional constraints for the political participation of women, *Zhenotdel* (Women’s Department of the Communist Party) was established in 1919. It aimed to emancipate women through full participation to labor force by making them politically active.³⁷⁶ In the mid-1920s, women in Central Asia started to join the Communist Party. The *Zhenotdel* officials encouraged them to attend the branches, and be part of public and private life by visiting the houses door by door.³⁷⁷

Kennedy-Pipe suggests that:

the *Zhenotdel* as an organization had two main aims. These were, first to expand the influence of the party among working-class women (with an

³⁷³ Kamp, M. (2002). Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2), pp.267-268.

³⁷⁴ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics*. London: Greenwood Press, p.221.

³⁷⁵ Women's Suffrage: A Timeline, Retrieved March 7, 2013 from, International Women's Democracy Centre Web site: <http://www.iwdc.org/resources/suffrage.htm>

³⁷⁶ Clements, B. E. (1992). The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*. *Slavic Review*, 51 (3), p.486.

³⁷⁷ Corcoran-Nantes, Y. (2005). *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London: Zed Books Ltd, pp.50-53.

emphasis on the peasant class) and second to liaise with other organizations to promote the construction of nurseries, since these were deemed essential for the liberation of women.³⁷⁸

The aim of converting the unpaid labor of women at home to paid labor at the laundries, dining halls, and daycare centers succeeded into a certain degree. It was assumed that this would lead to the increase in the number of independent women. Young women would choose their husbands freely, have economic independence and be equal with men. The aim was not about just transforming the daily life, but to transform the minds of women in the direction of Soviet ideology.³⁷⁹ Soviet women's emancipation campaign was carried out by the Central Asian Bureau of the Communist Party and *Zhenotdel* of the Communist Party in Central Asia.³⁸⁰ *Zhenotdel* was also important because the division allowed making decisions by women and for women.

Branches of *Zhenotdel* were opened in the republic of Bukhara and Khiva in 1923 and 1924 and in Ferghana in 1925. The Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union issued a statement in February 1925 affirming the "rights of women of the Soviet East", to free them from traditional and religious boundaries and to make them politically active members of the society. A *Zhenotdel* worker defined the expectation of women from the organization as follows: "Communism emancipates women, communism emancipates children, communism transforms the relations between the sexes into simply 'private relations,' communism transforms woman from the 'wife of a

³⁷⁸ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.92.

³⁷⁹ Goldman, W. Z. (1996). Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR. *Slavic Review*, 55 (1), p.52.

³⁸⁰ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.21.

person,' into a person.'³⁸¹ Also, propaganda journals like *Bezbozhnik u stanka* (The Godless at the Workbench) and the *Uzbek Kommunist* had run articles about the emancipation of Muslim women.³⁸² *Zhenotdel* in Central Asia focused on the transformation of women's status in the public life. Muslim women were supported to attend literacy classes, speak at public meetings, and join party organizations. Massive campaigns were organized to free women from the boundaries of customs. Pre-World War period experienced some successes about the emancipation of women.³⁸³ The obstacle was the adoption of NEP and its catastrophic effect on women. The revolutionary goals of the *Zhenotdel* were harmed by mass unemployment and deep poverty. Another obstacle was that although both Central Asian women and Slavic women were engaged in *Zhenotdel* in Central Asia, the leaders of the regional branches were the outsiders, not the local women.³⁸⁴ However, Clements argues that, other than such obstacles, creation of a new Soviet woman, portrayed as a true believer, revolutionary fighter, builder of a new life, was the utopia, and *Zhenotdel* would not achieved this aim.³⁸⁵ One of the main obstacles was the failure of *Zhenotdel* workers' to define the true problems of the Central Asian women. They believed that local women wanted to get rid of traditions and customs oppressing them. However, the

³⁸¹ Clements, B. E. (1992). The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*. *Slavic Review*, 51 (3), p.487.

³⁸² Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), p.21.

³⁸³ Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, p.257.

³⁸⁴ Massell, G. J. (1974). *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p.134.

³⁸⁵ Clements, B. E. (1992). The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*. *Slavic Review*, 51 (3), pp.486-487.

local women were not actively participating to *Zhenotdel* and they were not being the heads of the local branches. This resulted in a failure to define the problems and desired solutions proposed by Central Asian women themselves. The opening of the organization was promising, but the end result was not satisfactory for the local women themselves. Rather, some undesired consequences arose, such as the murders after the *hujum*.

In 1930, *Zhenotdel* was abolished by the Central Committee of Soviet Union³⁸⁶ because “its idea of "self-activity" for women was ‘so radical’ and ‘so utopian’ that it could not be incorporated into Stalin's redefinition of the revolution.”³⁸⁷

Under Khrushchev, in order to make deeper analysis about the lives of women and to mobilize women, *Zhenotdel* was restored by the name of *zhensovety*. It was suggested that:

women’s organizations were now justified on the grounds that they targeted one group within the population. ... Indeed, each group could be further subdivided: youth was composed of boys and girl; and women could be broken down into workers, *kolkhozniki*, housewives and girls. Thus the work of different *zhensovety* varied depending upon the ‘category of woman’ ... Women were not a homogenous mass, but a varied group.³⁸⁸

The typical sections of *zhensovety* were “mass-political work, production, daily life, culture, work among children, healthcare and the organization of public services.”³⁸⁹ Mass-political work aimed to “educate women politically and to

³⁸⁶ Clements, B. E. (1992). The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*. *Slavic Review*, 51 (3), p.495.

³⁸⁷ Goldman, W. Z. (1996). Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR. *Slavic Review*, 55 (1), p.48.

³⁸⁸ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp.146-147. (Emphasis original).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.150.

mobilize them into production and political activity,” production sections aimed “to raise the level of their [women’s] qualifications and attend night school,” the section for daily life aimed to “ease the hardships of working days,” cultural section aimed to “organize lectures and discussion groups on international affairs, law, politics, society, morality and aesthetics,” section for work among children aimed to “assortment of social activities,” and health care aimed to “promote health education.”³⁹⁰ Throughout the Brezhnev era, *zhensovety* had formally existed. The aim was “to raise women’s political consciousness and cultural level and to persuade women to develop their abilities.”³⁹¹ However, not single woman had an office on the Politburo during the 18 years of Brezhnev regime.³⁹²

Gorbachev had criticized Brezhnev that *zhensovety* had come to the situation of not fulfilling their objectives, so he called upon women to defend their rights.³⁹³ In mid-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev initiated political reforms. He called for the reemergence of women’s section under the national Women’s Committee. In 1987, “there were 24,000 women’s councils, and grassroots women’s initiatives began to emerge.”³⁹⁴

Despite all of these policies, the political participation of Central Asian women remained rather limited. The general failure of the Soviet system to

³⁹⁰ Buckley, M. (1989). *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp.150-152.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.177.

³⁹² *Ibid.* p.178.

³⁹³ *Ibid.* pp.209-210.

³⁹⁴ Zellerer, E. &Vyortkin, D. (2004). Women's Grassroots Struggles for Empowerment in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 11 (3), p.443.

engage women in politics had many reasons. Most importantly, the political system itself and men in the Soviet Union did not encourage women to be politically active. It was suggested that “men discouraged women from becoming politically involved.”³⁹⁵ Politics was perceived as a ruthless job, and politicians were expected to take risks, and spent long hours at work. These qualifications were assumed to be the characteristics of men, not women. It was suggested that women with children could not have enough time and energy for politics. Also, the Soviet women thought that politics was a dirty business, and should be left to the men. Therefore, both men and women had their own reasons to depoliticize women.³⁹⁶ Moreover, as indicated before, women had a double both at home and at work place. So, they could not have any time to be interested in politics.³⁹⁷ In addition, in Central Asia, women were not permitted to join political organizations; either husbands or fathers forbid them to be active in the political scene.³⁹⁸ Another very important issue was the regime’s fear of feminism, separating women’s interests with hostility. Some of the party officials claimed that there were no separate interests of women than men, as both men and women were workers with same interests.³⁹⁹ This point of view made it even more difficult to represent the interests of women in working place through trade unions, and political organizations.

³⁹⁵ Tedin, K. L. & Yap, O. F. (1993). The Gender Factor in Soviet Mass Politics: Survey Evidence from Greater Moscow. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46 (1), p.182.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.182.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p.205.

³⁹⁸ Gorsuch, A. E. (1996). "A Woman is Not a Man": The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928. *Slavic Review*, 55 (3), p.641.

³⁹⁹ Goldman, W. Z. (1996). Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR. *Slavic Review*, 55 (1), p.48.

3.2.2.5. The Consequences of the Soviet Policies

One of the main goals of the Soviet policy makers concerning women was to employ them outside their homes. This was assumed to be the best way of their emancipation. Once women would be visible in the economy, they were assumed to be visible in political and social life as well. In Central Asia, the issue of women's emancipation had to be given specific importance due to the Islamic culture of the region and traditions and customs (such as veiling) that the Soviet regime saw as obstacles for women's equality with men. Also, women's emancipation in Central Asia was vital for the success of policies on women due to the fact that the Soviet policy makers hoped to be an inspiration to the less developed nations by showing the success of Soviet model of development and emancipation process.⁴⁰⁰

To achieve its purposes, the Soviet regime initiated several propaganda campaigns. Furthermore, legislation was used to enforce new values. In the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres, policies aiming at the emancipation of women in line with the Soviet ideology were conducted. Women in Central Asia were forced to make a choice between being loyal to the regime and keeping their customs. Their choices would be visible and symbolically important, so they would be at the target no matter what they chose. The limits for women's equality with men were tried to be eliminated by the Soviet regime. To free women from household duties and make them active in labor market, organizations to handle childcare, cooking and cleaning tasks were created. The legislation mandating equal economic, marital and civil rights helped the regime

⁴⁰⁰ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.198.

to achieve its goals.⁴⁰¹ Also, in the political sphere, women were encouraged to be active participants in the party organizations with the initiatives such as quotas.

It can be suggested, however, that at the end of the Soviet era, although there were positive changes in the status of women, the aim of complete sexual equality in Central Asia was only partly achieved, and success was limited.⁴⁰²

On the one hand, it cannot be denied that Soviet women (including Central Asian women) made great contributions to industry, agriculture, retail trade, collective activities and transformation of everyday life in general.⁴⁰³ However, how effective these contributions were to emancipate women in Central Asia is questionable.⁴⁰⁴ It is frequently indicated that women received social help such as day care centers. The laws also were issued to guarantee their rights to enable them to participate into workforce. Likewise, the education level of women increased making them more equal with men both in public and private life. In their families their importance increased as paid laborers. Women in Central Asia were unveiled, free to walk on the streets alone, and could spend time in public arena. Moreover, involvement of women into political, economic, and social spheres of life gradually increased.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Gorsuch, A. E. (1996). "A Woman is Not a Man": The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928. *Slavic Review*, 55 (3), p.636.

⁴⁰² Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.186.

⁴⁰³ Randall, A. E. (2004). Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s. *Journal of Social History*, 37 (4), p.979.

⁴⁰⁴ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.194.

⁴⁰⁵ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics*. London: Greenwood Press, p.219.

However, it could hardly be suggested that full equality between men and women in Central Asia could be achieved in the Soviet era. Women continued to be subordinate in their families, bound by traditions and male dominance. According to Benería and Sen, there were two main reasons for the general failure of Soviet gender policies:

One is that the attainment of equality between the genders, has not been, for the most part, a primary revolutionary goal; rather, it has been viewed as derivative of a socialist organization of society. The second reason, which is in part a consequence of the first, is the relative neglect of the area of reproduction. ... ideological campaigns were launched ... to make men share the burden of domestic work. ... In the Soviet Union such an ideological campaign has not even take place.⁴⁰⁶

Another interpretation of partial failure of Soviet gender policies comes from Revzin and Graffy who state that Soviet policies were not imperial in intention, but they were imperial in effect. So, these policies being introduced from above made Central Asian women to be attached to their traditional structures stronger than ever.⁴⁰⁷ Soviet authorities almost always claimed that they supported gender equality, but in reality, women were seen as backward part of society having domestic responsibilities.⁴⁰⁸

Moreover, the Soviet ideological agenda itself was one of the reasons of failure. Women's participation to the labor market was forced due to the need for labor, not particularly to emancipate them. Moreover, Huber indicates that status

⁴⁰⁶ Benería, L. & Sen, G. (1982). Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Role in Economic Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications. *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1), p.171.

⁴⁰⁷ Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, p.272.

⁴⁰⁸ Randall, A. E. (2004). Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s. *Journal of Social History*, 37 (4), p.967.

of women was influenced less by feminist and Marxist ideology than by women's role for the regime's political and economic development.⁴⁰⁹ She explains that the Soviet regime worked for women's emancipation, and took many measures for this purpose. What was missing in the agenda of regime however, was the covert social obligation of motherhood. The Soviet Union pushed woman into the labor force without making her household responsibilities any easier. She also claims that in education, girls have been doing better than boys, especially in academic, extracurricular, and leadership activities. Despite that, however, in employment, lower-paying jobs had been more occupied by women. In politics, women had always been missing at the top positions. In family, they carried the household burden all alone.⁴¹⁰

Another reason was the disregard about the family structure as well as the customs and traditions which were the very basis of this structure in the region. Despite laws protecting them, women continued to face harassment in the house. Although marriage and divorce were legally regulated, allowing both partners the same rights, in practice the two sexes did not enjoy equality. As women were not visible in the political life, there were no political initiatives to change the domestic division of labor, family relations and traditional structures.⁴¹¹ In addition to that, the Central Asian women continued to carry the burden of traditional household chores.

Moreover, Central Asian people who were not familiar with the regime and its ideals did not understand and internalize the reasons of reforms affecting

⁴⁰⁹ Huber, J. (1979). Review: Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change. By Gail WarshofskyLapidus. *Social Forces*, 57 (4), p.1428.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp.1428-1429.

⁴¹¹ Pascall, G. & Manning, N. (2000). Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (3), p.262.

family dynamics. Also, some Muslims saw the reforms and changes as an assault on their customs and identity. The Soviet regime was seen as foreign by Central Asians and the Soviet authorities could not persuade the local population that emancipation of women was one of the important elements for development.⁴¹² Likewise, policies to regulate dress and public appearances of women did not bring real changes on their status within their families. As late as 1980s, even younger generations continued to marry in early ages and looked up to their elders and families to arrange their marriages. The customs outlawed by the Soviet Union did not totally disappear. The women in Central Asia simply adapted to new changes introduced into their lives. When veiling became illegal, for example, they started to cover themselves with shawls when going outside. When bride price was outlawed, the traditional gifts took its place. In factories, where men and women were supposed to work together, women chose to work segregated from men. As pointed out by an expert:

Two different status systems seem to be in operation simultaneously: in one, women are theoretically equal to men, with the same rights to move up and down the social and economic ladder; in the other, parallel system, however, there is not even pretence of female equality, even on the part of women themselves. Even women with higher education and good jobs often observe traditional etiquette within the home, and many seek female enclaves when forced into public life. With regard to religion, there is much evidence that Islam is still strong, particularly among Central Asian women.⁴¹³

Therefore, it can be suggested that the changes made for the emancipation of women was slow and limited. The Soviet regime tried to eliminate the bonds to

⁴¹² Edgar, A. L. (2006). Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet "Emancipation" of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective, In *Slavic Review*, 65 (2). Retrieved November 2, 2011 from <http://slaviccenter.osu.edu/pdf/Edgar.pdf>, p.270.

⁴¹³ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.194.

guarantee women's emancipation. However, in real life, traditions and customs were not seen by most women as obstacles to their emancipation. So, the values and traditions continued to be transferred from one generation to another.⁴¹⁴ The Soviet experience showed that religious beliefs, sexual mores, and family structures that evolved through centuries are deeply rooted, so it was really difficult to change them in Central Asia. The Soviet regime outlawed many practices, but they more or less survived in Central Asia. As Keller indicates, "Social change can be achieved when a critical mass of people supports it, but when that support is lacking and the proponents of change are ambivalent, permanent change at a deep level is impossible."⁴¹⁵

Finally as is described in this chapter in detail, depending on the priorities of the regime, there were certain modifications in its gender policies, resulting in many inconsistencies and conflictual attitudes on the part of the policy makers. Such modifications would cause confusions and unpredictability among Soviet women, including Central Asians.

In the following chapter, the post-Soviet era will be elaborated via analyzing the women's lives in the five independent republics of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, while keeping the failures and achievements of the Soviet officials in mind. This analysis will provide certain assumptions regarding the research question of this thesis in the conclusion chapter.

⁴¹⁴ Lubin, N. (1981). Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions. *Soviet Studies*, 33 (2), p.198.

⁴¹⁵ Keller, S. (1998). Trapped between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941. *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (1), pp.36-37.

CHAPTER 4

4. POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, all former Soviet countries had faced transition in all spheres of life, including gender issues. As a result of Soviet-era gender policies, women in Central Asia have inherited visibility both at home and outside home, political and labor force participation, high levels of education and legal rights to ensure the sustainability of women's participation to all spheres of life in Soviet era. After 1991, however, almost everything changed in the lives of Central Asian women, especially with the reemphasis on the Islam. This chapter analyzes the conditions of Central Asian women after the dissolution of the Soviet Union depending on the rising interest of local people on traditions that existed in the region in the pre-Soviet era.

4.1. Central Asian Women after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was sudden and had direct effect on the lives of Central Asian people. A Kazakh woman explains the dissolution of Soviet regime as follows: “our feelings about the disintegration of the Soviet Union are like the feelings of a family whose house has been destroyed suddenly by an earthquake or burned down by a fire.”⁴¹⁶

Roy claims that after 1991, everything was questionable and newly independent Central Asian countries had to find their own way for survival. They neither had an easy way back to the period before the Sovietization process, nor had opportunity and will to build their societies with the life-style that Soviets

⁴¹⁶ Nazpary, J. (2002). *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London, Sterling Virginia: Pluto Press, p.49.

promoted.⁴¹⁷ This situation was especially visible for the women who now had to face the fact that the Soviet-era gender equality policies were no more on the agenda. In this new era, there was a rise in the:

neofamilial ideologies that sharply criticize Soviet-style emancipation and advocate a return to ‘traditional families’; a gendered division of labor in the market economy, with women flooding the bottom part of the pyramid of small business as bazaar merchants; and a gendered division of labor in the political arena, with men dominating the formal governmental structures and political parties and women dominating nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). ... [Due to] Amid economic uncertainty, increasing impoverishment, and political instability, women in former Soviet Union find themselves awash in the crosscurrents of emerging discourses on their position in society, their jobs, and ultimately their control over their own bodies. ... the public/private split in women’s everyday lives has been a chasm.⁴¹⁸

In the light of this suggestion, the following parts investigate the changes in the life styles of Central Asian women in post-Soviet era in legal, socio-cultural, economic, and political areas.

4.1.1. Legal Area

After independence, the Central Asian countries formulated new legal rules to regulate the executive, judicial, and civil issues in the new states. In the scope of this work, the family code, criminal code and constitutions of these countries were investigated to see the differences and changes between theory and practice in the region after the Soviet Union.

⁴¹⁷ Roy, O. (2000). *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*. New York and London: New York University Press, p.161.

⁴¹⁸ Kuehnast, K. & Nechemias, C. (2004). Introduction: Women Navigating Change in Post-Soviet Currents. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Ecountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.2-3.

In Kazakhstan, the 1998 Law on Marriage and the Family remarks that the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys is 18. It is also stated that free will and consent of both parties must exist for the marriage. However, according to MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Kazakhstan 2006) data, 5% of girls between 15-19 years are engaged to be married, divorced or widowed. Religious marriages are not legal in the country and a woman in this kind of marriage is basically excluded from her rights in the event of a divorce. Under Article 11 of the Law on Marriage and the Family, polygamy is prohibited. However, according to the 2006 CEDAW (the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) shadow report “polygamous relationships do exist in Kazakhstan, particularly in the southern regions of the country.”⁴¹⁹

Article 60 of the Kazakhstani Law on Marriage and the Family points out that men and women have equal roles within the family.⁴²⁰ Also, Article 27 of the constitution states that “care of children and their upbringing shall be a natural right and responsibility of parents.”⁴²¹ Both women and men have the same rights in divorce and in child custody. However, it is indicated that although

in urban areas, women bringing up children on their own do not ... experience any discrimination or hostility; this is not the case in many rural areas, where in some cases, women who become pregnant out of wedlock are expelled from their families.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Gender Equality in Kazakhstan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kazakhstan>

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ The Constitution of Kazakhstan:: Kazakhstan's Constitution, Retrieved March 1, 2013 from http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/kazakhstan_constitution.shtml

⁴²² Gender Equality in Kazakhstan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kazakhstan>

In the year 2009, the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence was issued. This law elaborated the definition of violence so as to include abuses in physical, psychological, sexual and economic areas. Furthermore, the law guaranteed legal protection to women in cases of violence. However, in everyday life practices, the law stands just for appearance because violence has been widely accepted by both men and women.⁴²³

In Kyrgyzstan, Article 13 of the Kyrgyz Family Code states that “marriage age shall be eighteen years of age.”⁴²⁴ However, in 2006, 8% of the 15-19 years of girls were married or engaged. It is also indicated in the same Code that “only marriages registered in the offices for registration of acts of civil status shall be recognized.”⁴²⁵ So, as is the case in Kazakhstan, the parties engaging in unregistered and religious marriages have no legal rights in the event of divorce.

Also, under the Family Code, consent of both parties for the marriage is required. However, “young women throughout Kyrgyzstan are sometimes abducted and forced into marriage ... This often curtails the completion of their secondary or university education.”⁴²⁶

Under the Kyrgyz Criminal Code Article 153 it is stated that “polygamy, i.e. cohabitation with 2 or more women in common household, -shall be sentenced

⁴²³ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.5.

⁴²⁴ Family Code (draft), Retrieved March 10, 2013 from, ODIHR Documentation Center Web site: <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4950>

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ Gender Equality in Kyrgyz Republic/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (2012). Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

by up to 2 years of imprisonment.”⁴²⁷ However “1.7% of women questioned for the 2006 MICS stated that they were in polygynous (i.e. one male partner with multiple female partners) unions.”⁴²⁸

Article 31 of the Kyrgyz Family Code states that:

all issues relating to parenthood, child education and upbringing and other areas of family life are resolved by a mutual consent of the spouses. The spouses must treat each other as equal. The spouses must take care of their child's welfare and development.⁴²⁹

However, in reality, in their family, women face hierarchies of age and gender. They are expected to obey the decisions of their husbands, other male family members, and older female members of the family.⁴³⁰

In the year 2008, it is indicated in the Forum of Women’s NGOs of Kyrgyzstan that:

only 18 protection orders were issued since 2003 when the Law came to effect, whilst according to the National Statistics Committee, 4,651 women sought assistance from shelters, court of elders and other organizations and 4,135 cases of violence against women were registered; only 63 domestic violence cases reached the court in 2005-2006 resulting in issue of 18 court orders.⁴³¹

⁴²⁷ Kyrgyzstan: Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic (1997). Retrieved March 4, 2013 from, World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Web site: http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=248664

⁴²⁸ Gender Equality in Kyrgyz Republic/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (2012). Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

⁴²⁹ Family Code (draft), Retrieved March 10, 2013 from, ODIHR Documentation Center Web site: <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4950>

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ Bassiuoni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.12.

In Tajik society, marriage is an important thing for the status of women in the community. In the event of taking care of children, both mother and father are given the same responsibilities and rights in the family under Tajik law. In the event of divorce, they also have same rights. The Family Code that sets the minimum age for marriage as 18 for both boys and girls. According to the Tajik Criminal Code, “giving in marriage a girl, who has not reached marriage age by parents or guardians, is punishable by correctional labor for up to 2 years or restriction of freedom for the same period, or confinement for up to 6 months.”⁴³² However, “as of 2000, 13.9% of girls aged between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed, according to the UN, compared to just 2.3% of boys in the same age bracket.”⁴³³ It is reported that Tajikistan is listed among the first four countries between the years 2000 and 2009 in which the underage marriage has been taken place according to the data from Wealth Health Organization (WHO).⁴³⁴ In addition to that, religious marriages and unregistered marriages are on the rise in the country. As is the case in other Central Asian countries, in the event of a divorce from a religious marriage, the women had no rights before the law.

Under the Tajik Criminal Code Article 170, it is stated that “polygamy, that is contracting a marriage with two or more women is punishable by a fine in the amount of 200 to 500 times the minimum monthly wage or up to 2 years of

⁴³² Criminal Code 1998: Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, Retrieved March 3, 2013 from <http://sgdatabase.unwomen.org/uploads/Criminal%20Code%201998.pdf>

⁴³³ Gender Equality in Tajikistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/tajikistan>

⁴³⁴ WHO/ Europe/ Child and adolescent health - Child marriage – a threat to health (2012). Retrieved April 17, 2013 from, World Health Organization (WHO) Web site: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/Life-stages/child-and-adolescent-health/news/news/2012/12/child-marriage-a-threat-to-health>

correctional labor.”⁴³⁵ However, in the practice polygamy is a common practice in the country, mostly due to the demographic imbalance caused by the civil war (1992-1997), immigration of the males to foreign countries and the deterioration of women’s wealth.⁴³⁶

In the early 2000s, the law prohibiting domestic violence was prepared, but it is still to be enacted. It is reported that there is no extensive law regulating domestic violence. However, not only men but even women perpetrate domestic violence and harassment against other women. This is especially visible for mothers-in-law who are harassing their daughter-in-laws through limitations of liberty and food.⁴³⁷ It is reported by the State Committee on Statistics in cooperation with crises centers that “8,451 women had applied to NGO survivor support services in 2005 and 22.3 per cent applied due to physical violence, 0.8 per cent due to sexual violence, 56.5 due to psychological violence, and 20.4 due to economic violence.”⁴³⁸

In Turkmenistan, under the Family Code, both parties in marriages are given equal rights. Article 25 of the constitution indicates that:

men and women, upon reaching the age of marriage, have the right to mutually consent to enter into marriage and form a family. In their familial relations, spouses have equal rights. Parents or guardians have the right and obligation to raise children, ensure their health, development, and

⁴³⁵ Criminal Code 1998: Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, Retrieved March 3, 2013 from <http://sgdatabse.unwomen.org/uploads/Criminal%20Code%201998.pdf>

⁴³⁶ Gender Equality in Tajikistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/tajikistan>

⁴³⁷ Bassiouni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.18.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* p.19.

education, prepare them for work, and instill in them culture and respect for the laws and historical and cultural traditions.⁴³⁹

The minimum age for a girl and a boy to marry is set as 16. The data of 2000 of Demographic and Health Survey shows that 5.9% of the 15-19 aged girls were engaged in marriage, divorced or widowed.⁴⁴⁰ Also, marrying with free consent is also problematic in the country because both forced marriages and the marriages realized for getting bride wealth occur in Turkmenistan.⁴⁴¹

Polygamy is restricted under the Civil Law of Turkmenistan. And, under this law, man and woman are given the same rights and responsibilities in their relations with children.⁴⁴²

Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan specifies that “women and men shall have equal rights”⁴⁴³ and Article 18 indicates that “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before the law, without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, convictions, individual and social status.”⁴⁴⁴ Article 63 of the constitution and the Family Code also states that “marriage shall

⁴³⁹ Constitution of Turkmenistan, Retrieved March 4, 2013 from <http://turkmeniya.tripod.com/turkmenistanlaws/id10.html>

⁴⁴⁰ Gender Equality in Turkmenistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/turkmenistan>

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ The Governmental Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan - Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Retrieved March 5, 2013 from <http://www.gov.uz/en/constitution/#a1836>

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

be based on the willing consent and equality of both parties.”⁴⁴⁵ The minimum legal age of marriage in Uzbekistan is 17 for girls, and 18 for boys. Only registered marriages are recognized by government in the country.⁴⁴⁶

It is clear that in Uzbekistan, all citizens of the country must be treated equally in the matters of family and social life before the law. However, despite such laws, especially underage marriages of women cannot be prevented. It is stated that in 2006, 4.9% of the girls between 15-19 years were either engaged or married. Demographic and Health Surveys from the year 2002 indicate that 61.3% of such marriages were conducted without the will of the girls. Also, many marriages have no official registration, so the women who want to leave that kind of marriage would not have any legal rights to protect and guarantee them in the case of divorce and widowhood.⁴⁴⁷

In Article 126 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan, polygamy (polygyny) is prohibited: “polygyny ... shall be punished with fine from one hundred to two hundreds minimal monthly wages or correctional labor up to three years, or imprisonment up to three years.”⁴⁴⁸ However, the statement of “one household” is sometimes interpreted in such a way that man could marry and live with more than one wives as long as they live in separate houses.⁴⁴⁹ According to the

⁴⁴⁵ The Governmental Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan - Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Retrieved March 5, 2013 from <http://www.gov.uz/en/constitution/#a1836>

⁴⁴⁶ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Retrieved March 5, 2013 from <http://legislationline.org/download/action/download/id/1712/file/a45cbf3cc66c17f04420786aa164.htm/preview>

⁴⁴⁹ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

Coalition of Uzbek Women's NGOs, polygamy has been increasing in Uzbekistan due to the unclear statement of the law and due to the social acceptance of polygamy within the Uzbek community.⁴⁵⁰

4.1.2. Socio-Cultural Area

It is stated that in those societies experiencing transition women play a significant role and "the tradition and modernization are debated, new governments are legitimized, and age-old transitions are reconstructed in the name of women."⁴⁵¹

For the newly independent Central Asian states it was an urgency that they had to find a way to define themselves as distinct societies. They wanted to get rid of their Soviet past and turn back to their traditional Islamic heritage. Women were seen as the symbolic tools for this goal⁴⁵² and their dress codes as well as political participation and employment rates could be used for the purposes of Central Asian governments in a visible way.⁴⁵³ As Harris suggests for Tajikistan,

⁴⁵⁰ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

⁴⁵¹ Kuehnast, K. & Nechemias, C. (2004). Introduction: Women Navigating Change in Post-Soviet Currents. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.3.

⁴⁵² Abramson, D. (2004). Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.66.

⁴⁵³ Kuehnast, K. & Nechemias, C. (2004). Introduction: Women Navigating Change in Post-Soviet Currents. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.3.

from the beginning of the independence era, women have been under the pressure of the government which pushes them to dress native costumes so as to desovietize them. Establishing the pre-Soviet cultural identities has been the priority for Tajik government:

it is now seen as entirely possible that there may be a serious attempt in the near future to establish strongly Islamized gender identities, with male dominance and female submission considerably more strongly contrasted and women's ideal identities concomitantly more constrained than they are at present.⁴⁵⁴

It can be suggested that Islam emerged as a “cultural survivor of pre-modern Central Asia or as a national cultural trait amid many others in modern Soviet society.”⁴⁵⁵ In the post-Soviet era, the conservative idea that biology is destiny and the main determinant of the role given to women as mothers is on the rise among the Central Asian countries.⁴⁵⁶ As such, the changing tendencies in terms of fertility, abortion, marriage, polygamy, family relations and violence, veiling and education need to be analyzed to analyze the post-Soviet era.

Fertility of women is one of the most frequently emphasized topics regarding their role in the society. This emphasis specified the status of women in the society as care givers of children having the capacity to nurture. So, domestic duties of women are underlined through fertility. Larzeg argues that women who

⁴⁵⁴ Harris, C. (2000). The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.212.

⁴⁵⁵ Abramson, D. (2004). Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.67.

⁴⁵⁶ Kuehnast, K. & Nechemias, C. (2004). Introduction: Women Navigating Change in Post-Soviet Currents. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.4.

do not have a son are humiliated within their families and societies. It is stated that:

the traditional preferences for sons also remain strong, and examples of the custom of continuing to bear children until a boy has appeared are found all over Central Asia. Many women who have only daughters keep bearing until the birth of son, often not only under the pressure of the husband and relatives but also because of custom.⁴⁵⁷

The total fertility rate is highest in Tajikistan (about five children for a woman) among the Central Asian countries, and lowest in Kazakhstan with nearly three children for a woman. It is stated that “Kazakhstan is estimated to have the highest proportion of women who effectively control their fertility (39-44%) and Tajikistan the lowest (14-18%).”⁴⁵⁸

In line with the rise in contraception methods that would be expected to prevent the unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, opposition to abortion has also been rising in the Kazakhstan. However, “abortion remains a significant element of Kazakhstan's reproductive reality, especially as the country's birth rates continue to fall. Most perceived barriers to abortion revolve around its side effects to health and its monetary costs.”⁴⁵⁹ The total number or the ethnic composition of the women who received abortion is hard to know. However, it is suggested that:

if fertility rates are any indication, the majority of women who obtain abortions in the Central Asian Republics are of Russian or European origin. The ethnic population in Kazakhstan may be an exception to this

⁴⁵⁷ Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.52.

⁴⁵⁸ Turner, R. (1993). Tajiks Have the Highest Fertility Rates in Newly Independent Central Asia. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 25 (3), p.141.

⁴⁵⁹ Agadjanian, V. (2002). Is "Abortion Culture" Fading in the Former Soviet Union? Views about Abortion and Contraception in Kazakhstan. *Studies in Family Planning*, 33 (3), p.247.

rule, as this republic is relatively homogeneous in its acceptance of fertility control.”⁴⁶⁰

In terms of marriage, it is known that pre-Islamic traditions continued to survive throughout the Soviet era, and in the post-Soviet era, especially in the rural areas, these traditions are quite visible in wedding ceremonies. For example, in Tajikistan, “the groom and his friends jump over a bonfire, an act of purification that comes from Zoroastrianism.”⁴⁶¹ The wedding ceremony is mostly paid by the groom and his family. Bride wealth is realized as an important symbol of the groom’s family prestige. It is common for families to arrange marriages for their children. It is stated that:

when an appropriate woman has been found, the groom and potential bride will get the chance to meet each other and decide whether the other is acceptable. The date and any monetary transactions are then agreed upon and the groom’s family will begin the process of securing money necessary and planning the day of the wedding.⁴⁶²

Also, despite the laws setting the minimum age limit for the marriage, in the post-Soviet period, early marriage of girls has increased throughout Central Asia. A single woman of 20 years old was considered as an “‘old maid,’ with the result that many parents will rush to give their daughters away out of fear of not finding a suitable husband later.”⁴⁶³ In such a case, even the bride price would be

⁴⁶⁰ Turner, R. (1993). Tajiks Have the Highest Fertility Rates in Newly Independent Central Asia. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 25 (3), p.141.

⁴⁶¹ Rowe, W. C. (2007). Cultural Muslims: The Evolution of Muslim Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia. In C. Aitchison, P. Hopkings, M. Kwan *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*, Hampshire; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, p.149.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.* pp.149-150.

⁴⁶³ Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.53.

lower.⁴⁶⁴ Also, after the marriage, “residence is preferably patrilocal: adult sons often continue living in their parental home after they marry, big family sharing economy.”⁴⁶⁵ So, women barely had the chance to choose their husbands and to live in separate homes from the parents of the groom. Also, most marriages took place within the members of same ethnic groups.⁴⁶⁶

As was mentioned earlier in the post-Soviet period, polygamy has increased “as a solution for women who have difficulty finding a husband, as a means of alleviating poverty for widows and their children, and as a way to curb prostitution and the trafficking of women.”⁴⁶⁷ Also, in the post-Soviet era, bride kidnapping has been reemerged. Larzeg points out that traditionally there are two kinds of bride kidnapping: the first one exists without the consent of the bride and her family; the second one exists without the consent of her family but with the will of the bride. In addition to that, especially in post-Soviet period, third type of kidnapping has occurred to prevent the huge cost of the wedding ceremony where “all parties agree to a staged abduction.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.53.

⁴⁶⁵ Louw, M. E. (2007). *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge, p.75.

⁴⁶⁶ In all Central Asian republics, inter marriage between local people and ethnic Russians and/or Europeans is rare. For a woman or man from Central Asia, sharing the same cultural and religious beliefs is important to enter a marriage. Turner, R. (1993). Tajiks Have the Highest Fertility Rates in Newly Independent Central Asia. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 25 (3), p.141.

⁴⁶⁷ Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.54.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.54.

Werner claims that in terms of marriage, women in Kazakhstan have more freedom to select their spouses than in pre-Soviet times, despite the bride kidnapping. This is due to reason that in Kazakhstan, the number of Russian women is high and their freedom to choose their husband in a way “distors” the data. Nevertheless even for Kazakhstan it was reported in 1990s that 60% of the married couples were engaged by bride kidnapping.⁴⁶⁹

In terms of family relations, there are several problems that Central Asian women have to face. Hanks gives an example from Uzbekistan indicating the pressure on women to please their husbands and their families resulting even in suicide so as not to “face the social stigma of leaving a bad marriage or being rejected by her husband’s family.”⁴⁷⁰ In an environment of defining the girls as wives, mothers, and servers of the in-laws, this consequence became unavoidable. Also, in Kyrgyzstan, women from all ethnic groups are engaged in more conservative relationships with men outside family. The domestic responsibilities of taking care of their home and children are reemphasized as the duties of women in the country.⁴⁷¹ Also, a UN survey conducted in 2008 indicates that 80% of the Kyrgyz women had experienced domestic violence.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ Werner, C. (2004). *Feminizing the New Silk Road: Women Traders in Rural Kazakhstan*. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.112.

⁴⁷⁰ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.90.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.* Inc, p.383.

⁴⁷² Bassiuni, S. (2011). *Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.11.

Bassiuni states in the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) working paper that in 2010 Kazakhstan took steps towards promoting legislative measures to develop human rights as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Chair. Shortly before this position, certain laws regulating domestic violence, rape and gender equality had been issued.⁴⁷³ However, in everyday life, “extremely high levels of violence and discrimination against women”⁴⁷⁴ are seen. It is stated in the paper that:

violence against women appears to be prolific and pervasive; even where formative advancements have been made, such as the enactment of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2006-2016, implementation has been erratic and substantive change negligible; trafficking of persons, particularly of young women continues to be a serious problem; women face distinct economic hardship and employment discrimination; and there is a lack of female representation in public life and decision making bodies, in spite of a 30 per cent quota being legally required in political institutions.⁴⁷⁵

Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, also reported similar findings in 2010 for Kyrgyzstan where followings were observed:

domestic violence; bride kidnappings; trafficking and exploitation; conditions of detention and violence against women in detention; gender relations – Lesbian, bisexual women and transgender men prejudices; and sexual harassment and sexual violence.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.3.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.4.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* pp.4-5.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.10.

Kyrgyz women also experienced “employment discrimination and economic disadvantage; ... and lack of representation in decision-making and political organs.”⁴⁷⁷

In Tajikistan similar incidents were reported that:

violence against Women; forced and early marriage of girls and young women; increasing rates of suicide amongst women; abandonment, eviction and loss of property rights; limited participation in public life and decision making; trafficking of girls and women; and a falling education rate amongst girls.⁴⁷⁸

In Turkmenistan, basic concerns regarding women were listed as follows:

family relation difficulties particularly concerning forced marriage and discrimination against separated and divorced women; expulsion of women who are foreign nationals but married to Turkmen men; high-levels of domestic violence including physical, physiological and sexual abuse and deprivation of freedoms; and trafficking in women and girls.⁴⁷⁹

Likewise in Uzbekistan:

Domestic violence, which is believed to be pervasive, ... systemic social stereotyping and attitudes that subjugate women; family relation difficulties relating to forced marriage, bride kidnapping, polygamy and divorce practices; the economic and social deprivation of women; ... trafficking of women and girls⁴⁸⁰ are among the basic concerns indicated.

A basic area that exacerbates all of those problems is the rise of Islam in nation building process and cultural reconstruction. Throughout the region,

⁴⁷⁷ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.10.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.24.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.29.

national identity and Islam would be portrayed as coexisting and complementary components of identity. It can be stated that the most visible and important change in the lives of Central Asia women was the return to Islamic values and reemergence of veil in public area. In this era, the revival of Islam became visible with the rapid constructions of mosques and various policies of governments that glorify the Islamic traditions of the region. In this general framework, the veiled women began to be seen in the streets of the Central Asia with the promotion of Islamic way of life in all Central Asian societies.⁴⁸¹ Veiling has become a symbol of pre-Soviet identities of these societies, and become the symbol of the dignity of women. For example, the following has been claimed for Uzbekistan:

the act of veiling, whatever its individual motivation and spiritual consequences, is a ritual act that contributes de facto the Islamization of public space. Many women who veil in ways that are foreign to Uzbekistan are singled out and disenfranchised because this expression of Islam is understood to privilege symbolically a transnational Islamic community—statement of solidarity with Muslims around the world on issues of common concern and rapture with the Uzbek past.⁴⁸²

However, the issue of veiling started to cause certain problems. It was the question of whether the “acceptable national dress - a patterned scarf worn on the head and tied at the back of the neck, leaving the face open- and what they regarded as ‘Arab’ or foreign dress- a solid colored scarf that is clasped in front or covers the face”⁴⁸³ would be acceptable in these societies. For example, in

⁴⁸¹ Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.55.

⁴⁸² Abramson, D. (2004). Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.72.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.* p.70.

Uzbekistan, the second one was not confined with the traditions. Also, the clothes reminding the Russian culture were also assaulted, it is stated that “male youths would shout ‘dress like an Uzbek girl’ at young women who dressed in miniskirts or wore short hair that might have been died white or with multicolored streaks, according to Russian fashion.”⁴⁸⁴

One consequence of this tendency would be that in the name of restoration of Uzbek culture within the framework of pre-Soviet practices turned out to be the equalization of being Muslim with being Uzbek.⁴⁸⁵ However, the distinct characteristic of Uzbekistan regarding the veiling issue comes from the Karimov’s intolerance to Islam as a potential political force that brings people together. After 1991, Uzbek government sent college students abroad to study, especially to Turkey, however, when the Karimov government consolidated its power, these students were pulled back to Uzbekistan with the claim that they were exposed to the radical Islamic views of Fethullah Gülen. In the late 1990s, to prevent Islam having an independent organizing power among people, mosque leaders as well as the members of radical Islamist groups were arrested and foreign schools were closed down. As stated by an expert:

the state again interpreted the veil as an instrument, one that could be used to manipulate the whole structure underlying it. Young women who wore hijab were told that if they replaced their head covering with Uzbek style of headscarf they would not be expelled from the institutions of high education. In 1998, the government passed a law against wearing ritual dress in public spaces, and universities have used this law in subsequent years to deny education to veiled women.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁴ Abramson, D. (2004). Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.71.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.74.

⁴⁸⁶ Kamp, M. (2006). *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, p.235.

These tensions created a division between the secular and the conservative segments of Central Asian societies, especially regarding the place of women:

one of the central issues to occupy those either promoting Islamism or those concerned about it is the place of women in the society. The new governments have mostly continued to uphold the secular rights of women that they had during the Soviet period. However, towards the end of the Soviet era and into the independence years, the issue of women's dual roles in society has become an important identity issue. In overn [sic] 300 interviews in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, ... [it was] found that only the most conservative segments of society (i.e. the clergy and Islamists) wish to see women's secular rights changed to better reflect traditional Islamic norms. They stress that this is not a move to reduce their rights, but to reassert religious values over atheistic ones.⁴⁸⁷

Also, alongside with the revival of Islam, traditional roles of women are reemphasized in the post-Soviet era. Werner claims on the basis of a research conducted in the village of Shauildir in Kazakhstan in 2001 that:

although women frequently work outside of the household, their domestic responsibilities reflect more "traditional" gender roles. From the age of 5 or 6 years, girls are socialized to help with housework. Women's household chores include a number of daily tasks: caring for children, preparing meals, serving tea to guests, cleaning the house, washing clothes, arranging the daily bedding, milking cows and horses, working in the household garden, and assisting men with the care of domestic livestock. Many women also bake their own bread, prepare a variety of dairy products, and sew clothes for their family.⁴⁸⁸

Akiner states that the Soviet era changes mostly took place in the public domain, as the older traditions in private sphere continued to dominate to the

⁴⁸⁷ Rowe, W. C. (2007). Cultural Muslims: The Evolution of Muslim Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia. In C. Aitchison, P. Hopkings, M. Kwan *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*, Hampshire; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, p.156.

⁴⁸⁸ Werner, C. (2004). Feminizing the New Silk Road: Women Traders in Rural Kazakhstan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.111.

family relations.⁴⁸⁹ Despite the Soviet past and all the emancipation projects that tried to change the status of women by encouraging them to be part of economic and political spheres of life, in Uzbekistan [as elsewhere in Central Asia], most people continued to see the primary role of women to be wives and mothers responsible for domestic duties and childbearing. They were treated as the guardians of traditions in the post-Soviet period.⁴⁹⁰ For instance, in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, government promoted both equality between men and women, and traditional roles of women as the pivot of the ideology of national independence with the reemphasis on Islamic values. So, it is indicated that “young people in Bukhara now grow up in an environment where the relations between sexes are relatively conservative, and where norms of behavior are secured by a high degree of community control.”⁴⁹¹

In terms of education, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the literacy rate in Central Asia was 98%.⁴⁹² This meant that even the people in the most isolated areas of Central Asia had some access to education. After 1991, the funds for education was reduced, the economic downturn of families made it impossible to pay the necessary school supplies such as books. This resulted in the emergence of several problems in the education of the younger generations⁴⁹³ such as lack of

⁴⁸⁹ Akiner, S. (1997). *Between Tradition and Modernity: the Dilemma Facing Contemporary Central Asian Women*. In M. Buckley *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.262.

⁴⁹⁰ Louw, M. E. (2007). *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge, p.73.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.74.

⁴⁹² Rowe, W. C. (2007). *Cultural Muslims: The Evolution of Muslim Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia*. In C. Aitchison, P. Hopkings, M. Kwan *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*, Hampshire; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, p.157.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.* p.157.

skilled teachers, and lack of infrastructure. These problems affected the education of young girls more severely than boys.⁴⁹⁴ The number of the girls attending university education started to fall sharply after 1991 due to high college entrance fees. Many young women who wanted to get college education had to obey the rules of their families regarding their destinies. Many families encouraged their daughters to marry during their secondary education with the promise that her marital family would provide for her educational needs. However, it is stated that:

especially in the extended families common in rural and semi-rural areas, a new daughter-in-law can contribute considerably to family welfare through her domestic work, and her future economic contribution is not seen as worth[y] enough for her in-laws to be willing either to forgo her labor or to pay out significant sums of money towards her studies.⁴⁹⁵

Therefore, it can be suggested that some of the problems that female population in Central Asia has been facing are related to the economic decline and instability in these countries in the post-Soviet era.

4.1.3. Economic Area

It is frequently suggested that transition from a planned economy to a market economy resulted in inequalities between the sexes in favor of male workers, and jeopardized the advantages that women had been enjoying throughout the Soviet era.⁴⁹⁶ As an expert explains:

⁴⁹⁴ Country Profile: Turkmenistan (2007). Retrieved March 6, 2013 from Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, Web site: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Turkmenistan.pdf>

⁴⁹⁵ Harris, C. (2000). The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.217.

⁴⁹⁶ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.170.

the transition to a market economy has been costly in terms of real income and output decline, disproportional unemployment and underemployment among women, widespread impoverishment, a rapid deterioration of living standards and social safety nets, the loss of maternal and childcare benefits, deepening gender inequalities, and the decreasing presence of women in the government and formal political parties.⁴⁹⁷

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economies of Central Asian republics had faced the problems of “unemployment, poverty, deteriorating wages, rising prices, and a resurgence of patriarchal attitudes.”⁴⁹⁸ It is noted in the first years of independence, there was a rise in the unemployment of the women due to the lack of educational services, and post-Soviet reemergence of the traditional Islamic values that placed women within the confines of their homes. Moghadam argues that transition in women’s status became related not only to labor market, but also to cultural and national identity.⁴⁹⁹

In general women turned out to be “more vulnerable than men” in this process of economic transition. It is stated that:

the reasons for the gender-differentiated impact of the market reforms in the former Soviet republics are both cultural and economic. They are cultural in the sense that traditional gender ideology regarding men’s and women’s roles shapes the types of work that men and women can engage in, and it is economic in the sense that the nature of the reforms themselves

⁴⁹⁷ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.169.

⁴⁹⁸ Moghadam, V. (2000). Gender and Economic Reforms: A Framework for Analysis and Evidence from Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.25.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.25.

and the assumptions in the neoliberal economic thinking that inform them are not gender-neutral.⁵⁰⁰

The collapse of the Soviet Union and shifts to a market economy damaged Central Asian economies. Sharp declines in wages also contributed to the revival of the old traditions that encourage women to marry in early ages and start their own (large) families. Therefore, they would not have to work outside home. In other words, “the transition and its difficulties seem to have reinvigorated patriarchal views of women and gender relations and exacerbated the cultural constraints on women’s equality.”⁵⁰¹ So, Uzbekistan, for example, experienced revival of Islamist traditions with the gender-specific effects that put pressures on the education of women, and their social and political participation.⁵⁰²

As for Kazakhstan, women living in rural areas are facing more difficulties. Due to fewer opportunities to get a job in countryside, or hard physical labor required for the available jobs’ as well as low payment, almost 80% of the women in these areas were unemployed in 2000 in Kazakhstan (International Women’s Rights Watch 2000).⁵⁰³ Also, according to the Minister of Labor and Social Protection, currently “286 thousand women in Kazakhstan are

⁵⁰⁰ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.170.

⁵⁰¹ Moghadam, V. (2000). Gender and Economic Reforms: A Framework for Analysis and Evidence from Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.27.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* p.25.

⁵⁰³ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.238.

unemployed.”⁵⁰⁴ In Kazakhstan [as elsewhere in Central Asia], the decline in the economic situation has led the way to the increase in prostitution, and “many young women have fallen victim to international traffickers who lure them abroad and force them into jobs as sex workers.”⁵⁰⁵ It is indicated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that “76,000 women and girls were trafficked internally in 2009.”⁵⁰⁶

As in the case of Kazakhstan, women living in the countryside in Kyrgyzstan have been facing more difficulties in terms of finding a job. They mostly work in jobs with low payment and physical hard work. It is suggested that “women often work as field hands, planting, cultivating, and harvesting the country’s agricultural products, especially cotton, grain and vegetables.”⁵⁰⁷ Also, the decrease in the economic wellbeing of families resulted in sexual exploitation of women as the traffickers took them abroad with the promises of finding better jobs and yet forcing them into prostitution.⁵⁰⁸

In Tajikistan, also, there has been an enormous increase in the number of women who were willing to sell their bodies for their survival. Although most of these women were unmarried, widowed or divorcees, “some married women are

⁵⁰⁴ Nearly 300 thousand women in Kazakhstan unemployed (2013). Retrieved April 18, 2013 from, International Labor Organization (ILO) Web site: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/moscow/news/2013/0402.htm>

⁵⁰⁵ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.238.

⁵⁰⁶ Bassiuoni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.6.

⁵⁰⁷ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.383.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.384.

[also] taking lovers in order to keep their homes going.”⁵⁰⁹ In Tajikistan, not just the economic difficulties but also the civil war did result in the increase in the number of prostitutes. The country became “a low-income country with internal conflicts tied to Islamism and a growing refugee population. The civil was ruined the social and physical infrastructure, with especially adverse effects on women, pensioners, and children.”⁵¹⁰ It is further stated that women in Tajikistan are mostly employed in low-payment jobs in the agricultural, educational and health care services. It is suggested that wages in the male dominated sectors such as industry, construction and transportation are 4-7 times more than female dominated sectors.⁵¹¹

Due to the civil war, there was an increase in the rates of robbery, murder and violence in Tajikistan. Especially due to the fear of abduction and rape, women became even scared of going outside their homes. Also, the civil war resulted in an imbalance between female and male populations leading the way to polygamy. Women’s access to education, work or health care was also undermined during the civil war. The number of businesses started by women is negligible.⁵¹² The opportunities for women to work in private sector are also low,

⁵⁰⁹ Harris, C. (2000). The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.220.

⁵¹⁰ Moghadam, V. (2000). Gender and Economic Reforms: A Framework for Analysis and Evidence from Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.29.

⁵¹¹ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.20.

⁵¹² Harris, C. (2000). The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.215.

and it is stated that “the advent of the market has brought with it increased compulsion for women to sell their bodies in order to survive.”⁵¹³

In Uzbekistan, the heads of families are men, while women are responsible for domestic work and childbearing. So, “in more than half of households (57.9%), husbands alone decide about important expenses.”⁵¹⁴ It is also reported that Uzbekistan has been a source, transition and destination country for the trafficking of women. As such, “women working in prostitution are extremely vulnerable and often targeted and subjected to extortion by law enforcement officials.”⁵¹⁵ In the country, especially in the urban areas, women from different ethnic groups commonly work outside home, and have an equal opportunity to occupy administrative positions. In the rural areas, however, women mostly work as agricultural workers and their position is much harder than women in urban areas due to

lack of basic infrastructure, especially shortages in the provision of clean drinking water and proper sanitation, fewer employment and educational opportunities, and greater social pressure to marry and have large families at a young age.⁵¹⁶

The declining influence of the state offices to support the people by social services caused difficulties among working classes, especially women. Despite the existence of laws guaranteeing their rights, “working class women are among

⁵¹³ Harris, C. (2000). The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period. In F. Acar, A. Güneş-Ayata *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, p.216.

⁵¹⁴ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

⁵¹⁵ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.29.

⁵¹⁶ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.90.

first to lose their jobs, to be abused, to be the subject of harassment or unwanted advances, or to face discrimination in pay.”⁵¹⁷ As a response to this change, Abazov suggests that the new conservative groups emerged especially in the remote cities and towns supporting the revival of the traditional way of life style with the emphasis on conservative Islamic traditions, polygamy, and veiling of women. The result was the revival of male dominating traditions. It is stated that:

this has created a deep divide and mistrust between conservative and liberal groups in society. In this environment, women are often required to return to traditional roles- to get into early and forced marriages, to stay at home, to be obedient wives, and to behave and dress strictly according to conservative rules.⁵¹⁸

The deterioration in the economic conditions of families and men dominating the business networks, women had no choice but to turn to sexual strategies such as “finding a good job by responding to employers’ sexual demands; finding a wealthy husband; finding a ‘sponsor’, a lover who will support her financially; and sex work.”⁵¹⁹ The advertisements from the paper called *Karavan* portrays the general understanding of women in working environments. The advertisement from 23 August 1996 states that “woman (*zhenshchina*), 36 years old – work. Sex is not offered (*intim ne predlagat*’).”⁵²⁰

The rise in the sexualized work is also related to increased access to the outside world after the collapse of Soviet Union. Especially in big cities more liberal sexual attitudes and the promotion of a consumer culture resulted in first

⁵¹⁷ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.230.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.230.

⁵¹⁹ Nazpary, J. (2002). *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London, Sterling Virginia: Pluto Press, p.90.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.* p.91.

time occurrences of “colorful and erotic contests like ‘Miss Kazakhstan’ and ‘Miss Kyrgyzstan’ ... [that] were widely televised throughout the republics.”⁵²¹

Likewise, the abolition of censorship or state control led the way to a stream of pornographic movies and visual materials without any regulations. In addition to that, “the internet ... packed with erotic and suggestive pictures of young half-naked local girls”⁵²² is also available. By the 2000s, industry of the sex service had surfaced all around Central Asia with an increasing number of prostitutes and brothels.⁵²³

In this context, it may be useful to look at the Labor Codes of Central Asian republics in terms of maternity leaves. In Kazakhstan, section 66 of the Labor Code states that “women shall be granted maternity leaves of seventy calendar days before the childbirth and fifty-six ... days after the childbirth.”⁵²⁴ Also, the Employment Law prohibits the discrimination based on gender in work place. However, 2006 CEDAW report states that unemployment among women has been rising.⁵²⁵ It is reported that:

women make up nearly half of the country’s labor force. In 2008 seven of 15 industries showed a female share above this average as well as a female majority. Women are clearly over-represented in four occupational groups at the higher and middle levels, each time with more than a two to

⁵²¹ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.228.

⁵²² *Ibid.* p.228.

⁵²³ *Ibid.* p.228.

⁵²⁴ Kazakhstan: Labour Law 1999, in force 1 January 2000, Retrieved March 7, 2013 from, National Laws on Labour, Social Security and related Human Rights Web site: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/55770/65190/E99KAZ01.htm#c8>

⁵²⁵ Gender Equality in Kazakhstan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kazakhstan>

one parity; even at the level of legislators, senior officials and managers, the female share of 38% is in international perspective rather high.⁵²⁶

However, it must also be kept in mind that the ratio of working women among the Slavic populations of Kazakhstan is much higher than the ratio of working women among the Kazakhs.

It is stated in Article 310 of the Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic that “upon application and based on medical certificate women are entitled to prenatal leave of 70 calendar days and postnatal leave of 56 calendar days.”⁵²⁷ Also, in this code, discrimination on the basis of gender was prohibited. However, according to a 2008 report, rates of unemployment are higher among women than men, and more than 50% of the women workers have been working in agriculture which means that they cannot benefit from this legislation. Also, it is stated that “in addition, beyond agriculture, there is pronounced gender segregation in the labor market, with women concentrated in lower-paying health, education, and social services.”⁵²⁸ So, even if women are employed, they hardly make enough money to meet their needs and be financially independent.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ Klaveren, M., Tjinders, K. & Hughie-williams, M. (2010). *An Overview of Women's Work and Employment in Kazakhstan*. Retrieved March 10, 2013 from, University of Amsterdam / Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS) Web site: http://www.wageindicator.org/documents/dfl-country-reports/Decisions_for_life-Country_Report-Kazakhstan.pdf

⁵²⁷ Labor Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, Retrieved March 10, 2013 from <http://www.libertas-institut.com/de/Mittel-Osteuropa/Draft%20Labor%20Code.pdf>, p.101.

⁵²⁸ Gender Equality in Kyrgyz Republic/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (2012). Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

⁵²⁹ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.15.

In Tajikistan, maternity leave is set as 140 days, and Article 25 of the Constitution and Article 7 of the Labor Code prohibited gender based discriminations at work places. However, due to the collapse of manufacturing industry in the country and devastating effects of the dissolution of Soviet economy, many women were forced to be engaged in low paid and irregular works in agriculture, or they became part of the illegal economy, if they were not forced out of their jobs. Also, it is indicated that “on average, women’s wages are less than half of men’s, according to the Asian Development Bank.”⁵³⁰

In Turkmenistan, Employment Law guarantees equal rights for both men and women despite the fact that women were forbidden from certain dangerous and unsafe jobs.⁵³¹ Article 68 of the Social Security Code of Turkmenistan provides “a maternity leave of at least 112 calendar days.”⁵³² However, women in Turkmenistan are over-represented in the agricultural and traditional sectors. As explained in a report:

girls generally prefer training programmes related to medicine, physical culture and pedagogic, whereas boys opt for communications and transport. Disproportions in the number of students at higher educational institutions negatively affect gender balance in the income level of the population and in the labor market.⁵³³

⁵³⁰ Gender Equality in Tajikistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/tajikistan>

⁵³¹ Gender Equality in Turkmenistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/turkmenistan>

⁵³² Work and Family Relations in Turkmenistan, Retrieved March 9, 2013 from, International Labour Organization (ILO) Web site: http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/moscow/info/publ/turkm_en.pdf

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

So, it can be concluded that gender-based discrimination at work force exists in the minds of Turkmen people and not in laws.

In Uzbekistan, Labor Code indicates that “maternity leave is paid for no less than 70 days prior to the birth and 56 days following the birth.”⁵³⁴ The gender based discrimination was banned with this law; however, it is reported by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) that “23% of women work in agriculture, most often as unpaid laborers on household or collective agricultural plots. Even women who are also employed elsewhere are often expected to work in the fields as well.”⁵³⁵

Despite such negative consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union in the lives of women, some measures are also taken by women to make sure that they will economically survive. Following the downfall of the Soviet Union, marketplaces in Central Asia have emerged as the New Silk Road.⁵³⁶ It is stated that:

on the new Silk Road, the old commodities have been replaced by ‘modern’ global commodities. ... Nevertheless, the nature of this trade is imbued with the spirit of the ancient Silk Road. ... In particular, women

⁵³⁴ Doing Business in Uzbekistan, Retrieved March 9, 2013 from, Web site: http://www.bakermckenzie.com/files/Uploads/Documents/Supporting%20Your%20Business/Global%20Markets%20QRGs/DBI%20Uzbekistan/qr_uzbekistan_dbguide_06employment_2009.pdf, p.38.

⁵³⁵ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

⁵³⁶ “For centuries, male caravan traders journeyed across the steppes and deserts of Central Asia along the legendary Silk Road. ... Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the bazaars of Soviet Central Asia have once again filled with foreign goods. On the New Silk Road, the old commodities have been replaced by modern global commodities ...” Werner, C. (2004). *Feminizing the New Silk Road: Women Traders in Rural Kazakhstan*. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp.105-106.

dominate the exchange of cloth and clothing that is exchanged as gifts, and also as food products that are used to feed families and honor guests.⁵³⁷

Such visibility of the merchant women in market places and other public squares would be in contrast to the Islamic stereotypes that seclude women.⁵³⁸ The trade business of women in Kazakhstan has provided three benefits for women. These benefits are listed by an expert as follows:

First, many of the women enjoy the social atmosphere of the bazaar. ... A second perceived benefit is that merchant women have fewer responsibilities at home because of their responsibilities at work. ... Third, some merchant women relish the travel and shopping opportunities involved with this line of work.⁵³⁹

Furthermore, new solutions were found by women to provide support for their families and themselves. Berg claims on the basis of a research conducted in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 1997 that an informal network of women was provided by *gap*. She describes *gap* as follows:

a group of people were sitting around a well-spread “table” in the parlor offering a prayer to every newcomer. We sat down, ate, and chatted. At the end of the evening, the participating women pulled money out of their dresses and bras and gave it to one of other guests, who noted each amount in a small notebook and handed the sum amount over to the hostess.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Werner, C. (2004). *Feminizing the New Silk Road: Women Traders in Rural Kazakhstan*. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.106.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.* p.106.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.* p.120.

⁵⁴⁰ Berg, A. (2004). *Two Worlds Apart: The Lack of Integration between Women’s Informal Networks and Nongovernmental Organizations in Uzbekistan*. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.196.

The *gap* is a social activity for women where they exchange information and express themselves. In addition to that, it also meets certain economic needs. The money that was gathered by the hostess contributes to the household budget. Also, women use this money for the weddings of their children, or the urgent needs of the family.⁵⁴¹

Finally, Abazov claims that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, international corporations coming to the region facilitated the foundation of homegrown private enterprises that resulted in a limited number of highly paid women and girls. But, surprisingly, Abazov states that “the market pressure had energized many women, as many of their men could not adapt to the transition or consumed by alcoholism or depression or the stresses of new ways of life.”⁵⁴² For example, in Kazakhstan, in 2003, the percentage of self-employed women was 42, while men were 36.8%. As new kinds of solidarity groups are formed among female professionals in order to reduce the destructive effects of transition while supporting each other and staying close to each other,⁵⁴³ women tend to cope better than men in the post-Soviet era.

4.1.4. Political Area

It has been suggested by an expert that women have been losing their rights and positions in the local and national governments in the post-Soviet era,

⁵⁴¹ Berg, A. (2004). Two Worlds Apart: The Lack of Integration between Women’s Informal Networks and Nongovernmental Organizations in Uzbekistan. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp.198-199.

⁵⁴² Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.229.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.* p.229.

and are being faced with exclusion.⁵⁴⁴ The most important reason for this negative development is the removal of the quota system for the representation of women that had existed in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴⁵ In addition to that, as was the case in the Soviet era that:

the double burden, gender role socialization, the commonly shared belief that politics is ‘men’s work’ and is inherently corrupt and dirty have contributed to the small number of women in public office and to the low levels of women’s participation in political parties in all of the former Soviet republics.⁵⁴⁶

Nevertheless, this decrease in the representation of women has led to the emergence of new channels for women to make themselves heard: the NGOs which benefited from the Western aids. However, it is suggested that this aid “is a double-edged sword, and while it provides NGOs with funding and support, it also exposes them to foreign direction and control.”⁵⁴⁷

In Kazakhstan, 19 out of the 109 members of the House of Representatives were women, representing the 17.76% of the total. Also, in the Senate, women constitute 4.26% of the total number. As compared to politics, Kazakh women are more active in the NGOs. However, “as Kazakhstan is now ranked as an upper

⁵⁴⁴ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.173.

⁵⁴⁵ The quota system in parliament and governmental offices has been restored in all Central Asian countries. However, the scope and the women’s number in the top officials jobs has remained limited.

⁵⁴⁶ Ishkanian, A. (2004). Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In M. P. Amineh, H. Houweling *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, p.173.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.178.

middle income country, much of the international donor aid that previously supported women's rights groups has been withdrawn, jeopardizing their continued activities."⁵⁴⁸ But, this situation did not slow down the efforts of the NGOs to prevent domestic violence and sex trafficking. It is stated that "the political participation of women as representative[s] across government institutions has been slowly improving but, still falls below the 30 per cent quota established by Kazak law."⁵⁴⁹

In Kyrgyzstan, the most distinct characteristic of the country is the active participation of the women into politics since independence. Many women have been elected for the parliament of the country, the *Jogorku Kenesh*, since independence.⁵⁵⁰ Also, the active participation of women in NGOs and the awareness towards the problems of women have been increasing in the country.⁵⁵¹ In April 2010, Roza Otunbaeva became the first woman president of the Kyrgyzstan until the election of 2011 (resulted with the victory of Almazbek Sharshenovich Atambayev). However, not a single woman took a seat in the coalition government of 2010. In contrast to the limited number of women in government, they have been very active in the domains of education and civil society. It has been stated that:

⁵⁴⁸ Gender Equality in Kazakhstan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kazakhstan>

⁵⁴⁹ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.8.

⁵⁵⁰ Hanks, R. R. (2005). *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Santa Barara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, Inc, p.382.

⁵⁵¹ Gender Equality in Kyrgyz Republic/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (2012). Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

women's rights NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are extremely active and vocal on a wide range of issues, including: domestic violence, bride abduction and trafficking; encouraging women to take a more active role in political life; and micro-credit provision. The women's movement was prominent in campaigns to encourage the adoption of legislation on domestic violence, and to reject the attempts made by lawmakers to decriminalize polygamy. There are also many prominent women leaders among other civil society groups.⁵⁵²

30% gender quota was established for all levels of government positions which have a positive effect on the women's political participation.⁵⁵³ However, this quota was applied in candidate lists, not in distribution of seats. Also, the order of the candidate lists affects the success of women. It is stated that:

all winning political parties implemented the basic minimum requirement to place women candidates not more than three spaces apart on the top of the their lists, and then proceeded to place more women towards the bottom in order to comply with the 30 per cent quota. The overall percentage of women placed towards the top of candidate lists correlates with the percentage of women actually elected to parliament. Women were well-represented at the lower levels of the election administration, but underrepresented at the upper levels.⁵⁵⁴

In Tajikistan's House of Representatives, 12 out of 63 members were women in 2011 representing 19.1%. Also, 14.7% of the seats of the National Assembly were taken by women. In the top governmental positions, the presence of women is rare in Tajikistan. However, women have been very active in NGOs.

⁵⁵² Gender Equality in Kyrgyz Republic/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (2012). Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

⁵⁵³ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.15.

⁵⁵⁴ Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 10 October 2010 (2010). Retrieved March 10, 2013 from, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Web site: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/74649>, p.17.

Women's rights groups in Tajikistan have been influential in preparing legislation on domestic violence, raise the conscious of women in terms of their rights, and provide them micro credits to start up their own businesses.⁵⁵⁵

Regarding the political participation of women in Turkmenistan, an expert states that there is a low representation of women in the decision making organs of the country. Only 15% of the members of the Turkmen Parliament are women and they hold only very few top positions.⁵⁵⁶

Roy claims that the revival of the Islamic values could be the contributing factor explaining the low percentage of women members in the parliament of Uzbekistan. During the period of 1991 and 1994, this percentage has fallen from 9 to 6.⁵⁵⁷ However, by 2011, 28 seats out of 120 were taken by women representatives in Uzbekistan's Legislative Chamber constituting the 23.3% of the parliament. Also, 15% of the Senate members were women. Despite such percentages, women's representation in the *mahalla* committees⁵⁵⁸ was poor in the country.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁵ Gender Equality in Tajikistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/tajikistan>

⁵⁵⁶ Bassiuni, S. (2011). Briefing Note on the Situation of Women in Central Asia. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Division for Gender Equality Office of the Director-General, p.26.

⁵⁵⁷ Roy, O. (2000). *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*. New York and London: New York University Press, p.182.

⁵⁵⁸ "Promoting it as a "traditional institution," the Uzbek government has embraced *mahalla* as a "fundamental unit" of society *Mahalla* were legitimized into law in 1993 under the Law on Institutions of Self-Government of Citizens, otherwise known as the Mahalla Law. Uzbekistan is divided into an estimated 10,000 *mahalla* of varying population sizes but averaging roughly 2,000 persons *Mahalla* communities are homogenizing agents intended to ensure social solidarity by placing demands on members to conform with the communal norms In addition, the institution upholds community standards by providing an authoritative basis to motivate residents to assist one another and improve and maintain the neighbourhood as a whole Members of the community provide for and receive social services, including support to the elderly, intervention in cases of domestic violence and in order to discourage divorce, adjudication of disputes between residents and provision of subsistence employment' as well as to pressure the relatively wealthy to

Berg argues that in about ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, women in Uzbekistan were active in two domains: informal networks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During the 1990s, large amounts of aid money had been provided by international NGOs to meet the needs of Central Asian women. Although women lost their influence in the parliament, they gained their places in these NGOs. In 2004 women constituted 10.4% of the parliament in Kazakhstan, 16% in Turkmenistan, and 16.4% in Uzbekistan.⁵⁶⁰ Although women worked in state offices during the Soviet era, NGOs were the new places of work. It is a fact that while some women suffered in transition period, some flourished. In this sphere, urban women had more access to donor agencies which supported the NGOs. However, due to lack of information and infrastructure, rural women's participation stayed limited. So, rural women debated and tried to find solutions to their needs and problems through informal networks. This situation

share with the needy In modern Uzbekistan, *mahalla* leadership draws on four distinct sources of authority. Under authority of law, a chairperson (*rais*) leads the *mahalla* committee (*kengash*). As of 1999, the *rais* is a state employee selected in an unstandardized process of appointment by district government, internal voting, and consensus. Second, under informal authority, an *aksaqal* (whitebeard) is an older male in a *mahalla* selected by consensus from his generational cohort for his wisdom, personal clout, and managerial finesse. As wealth engenders respect, the wealthy comprise a third authority. Finally, under female authority, a senior *mahalla* woman assumes an informal leadership role, often in tandem with formal service on a *mahalla* women's committee” Uzbekistan: Role of "mahalla" in Uzbek society; whether mahalla are involved in extortion; state protection (2004). Retrieved April 22, 2013 from, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada Web site: <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=publisher&publisher=IRBC&type=&coi=UZB&docid=41501c6f23&skip=0>

⁵⁵⁹ Gender Equality in Uzbekistan/ Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Retrieved March 2, 2013 from, OECD Development Centre Web site: <http://genderindex.org/country/uzbekistan>

⁵⁶⁰ Abazov, R. (2007). *Culture and Customs of the Central Asia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, p.229.

led the way for NGOs to turn to the informal networks to meet the necessities of rural women in Uzbekistan.⁵⁶¹

4.2. Conclusion

It can be suggested that in the post-Soviet era, Central Asian women are stuck between Soviet ideals and Islamic traditional ideas, resulting in some discriminations. Larzeg underlines three of these discriminations as “traditions of patriarchy, Soviet ideals, and images from the West.”⁵⁶² It is indicated that the patriarchal system expected women to obey the tradition of seclusion, while the Soviet system expected women to be part of the labor force and be capable of handling household duties. Also, under Western consumerism the women were expected to be sex objects working to get profit.⁵⁶³ So, Central Asian women are still asked to be mothers, wives, workers, just had been the case in the Soviet Union. However, while the Soviet regime pushed women to be freer and economically independent members of the community, post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia pushed them to be good Muslims and good protectors of the traditions.

In the post-Soviet Central Asia, women have experienced gender division in labor market, in politics, and family relations. The image of independent women that had always been supported by Soviet officials has been damaged.

⁵⁶¹ Berg, A. (2004). *Two Worlds Apart: The Lack of Integration between Women’s Informal Networks and Nongovernmental Organizations in Uzbekistan*. In K. Kuehnast, C. Nechemias *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, Washington D.C., Baltimore and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, p.214.

⁵⁶² Tabyshalieva, A. (2000). *Revival of Traditions in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. In M. Lazreg *Making the Transition Work for Women in Europe and Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, p.55.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.* p.55.

Although women are given equal rights before law which set limits for the minimum age for marriage, prohibits polygamy and domestic violence, grants equal responsibilities for parenthood for both sexes, in the implementation, they mostly fail. The access of women to get an education was limited in this era due to economic hardships, rise in early marriages, and a renewed emphasis on the traditional roles of women. Conservative ideas regarding the status of women in Central Asian families have resurfaced and became dominant in the political and economic spheres of life limiting women's participation in these areas. The new sector of economic survival for women was prostitution and sex trafficking.

It must, however, be emphasized that the Soviet regime, being closed and authoritarian, had a tendency to conceal and/or manipulate real data regarding every aspect of life, including gender statistics. As such, it can also be assumed that some of the post-Soviet challenges of Central Asian women may actually have roots going back to the Soviet era. These "new" challenges may actually simply be the ones that are more visible today as we no longer have the Soviet regime with its tendency of "lying with statistics."

Not all changes in the lives of women in the post-Soviet era, however, can be treated as negative. In some cases Central Asian women adopted to the changes and used them for their own benefit as they used to do in Soviet the era. They started to work in the *bazaars*. They created their own networks providing mutual financial support in the case of *gap* meetings. For improving their lives as well as the lives of their families, they worked hard, no matter what new governments have in mind for women.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

This study deals with the status of women in Central Asia basically after the involvement of the Soviet Union in the region as well as the effects of Soviet heritage on Central Asian women's lives, both in public and private spheres of life after 1991. To give a clearer picture, pre-Soviet and post-Soviet habits and lifestyles of Central Asian women are investigated. The basic ideas that construct the Soviet socialist ideology are also emphasized to clarify the differences between theory and practice. The basic aim is to explain the real intentions behind Soviet gender policies about the emancipation of women in the region and to answer the research question of this study: What were the real intentions behind Soviet gender policies regarding women's emancipation in Central Asia?

In theory, Marx and Engels believed that the basic problem regarding the oppression of women was related to private property in general and men's perception of women as their private property in particular. So, they expected women to be emancipated from oppression when they would gain their economic independence through participation to the labor force so that they could no longer be perceived as the property of men, but the determining force for their own needs. Lenin gave special importance to women for the success of the communist regime in Russia because women constituted half of the labor force. Under socialism they would no longer be oppressed by household duties and as such could be part of political activities, too. Stalin also gave great importance to women's participation to labor force due to the need of development of industry in his time. It seems that the handling of the women's emancipation within the framework of the Soviet ideology concentrated mostly on economic concerns rather than cultural and political ones.

In this general context, during the 1920s, Central Asian women were tried to be freed from the burdens of their traditional ways of life, with the ambitious projects such as *Hujum*. In the 1930s and 1940s, women were perceived as “devoted workers” on the path of creating socialism. As such, all attention was given to provide the necessary conditions for the participation of women to the labor force. After Stalin, the woman question once again became part of the public agenda. In 1956, Khrushchev underlined the importance of women being active in the political arena. By the 1980s, Soviet women in general and Central Asian women in particular had proven themselves to be successful in various spheres of life, despite the fact that policies regarding women’s emancipation had been shaped mostly by the shifting needs of the regime. As such, the real intentions of different Soviet leaders in promoting women's rights throughout the seven decades of socialist experience become a controversial issue.

As mentioned in the Introduction of this study, the analysis of Massell regarding Central Asian women can be used to get a more clear idea about the intentions of the Soviet regime about women’s emancipation. His first assumption is that all societies have different types of antagonisms; it may be between men and women or between old and new. However, there were no such antagonisms that the Central Asian people wanted to put an end, as their way of life and their social organization in their communities were working perfectly and harmoniously for them. Policies such as *Hujum*, in contrast with its expected outcome, however created antagonisms within Central Asian societies and resulted in anger and frustration against the Soviet regime.

Second assumption of Massell is to find an alternative way to organize Central Asian people with the communist ideals due to their unique character of lack of social struggle. He assumed that Central Asian societies had no social fragmentation, so in the absence of battling forces, the Soviet regime had to find some reference points to create a connection with the local people. He seems right about this assumption because in the pre-Soviet era, Central Asian people had a

traditional and nomadic way of life with Islam being a common denominator. So the Soviet regime had to find a way to create a bridge between its atheistic and socialist ideology. It seems that Soviet officials had failed to create this bridge because if they achieved their purpose, Central Asian republics would not be so eager to revive many of their pre-Soviet era traditions after 1991.

Massell's third assumption is about using women for realizing revolutionary goals and transforming whole society. This had always been the agenda of the Soviets right from the very beginning. In line with the specific needs of the regime, gender policies were formulated, changed, and revised.

Fourth assumption of Massell is that women in Central Asia was expected to resent the traditional way of life due to their second-class positions, so this resentment could be used for realizing the purposes of the Soviet regime in the region. This was the main assumption of Soviet officials, too. They expected women in Central Asia to be their fierce supporters. However, this was not the case. Central Asian women had no awareness of subordination imposed by the Islamic traditional way of life dominant in the region back then. For example, when they had been forced or encouraged to unveil, most women, like their families, perceived this attempt as an assault to their life style, their traditions, their customs, and their heritage.

Massell's final assumption is also related to this. He suggests that the resentment of Central Asian women regarding their traditional way of life would make them a significant revolutionary force, however while some women committed themselves to the ideals of Soviet regime, most of them tried to hold on to the pre-Soviet habits of society.

The basic categorization made by Anthias and Yuval-Davis related to gender policies also needs to be mentioned. As indicated in the Introduction, women are seen "as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; and/or as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; and/or as central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as

transmitters of its culture; and/or as signifier of ethnic/national differences; and/or as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles.”⁵⁶⁴

Soviet officials wanted to create a society in which the most important identity would be “Soviet”. So, ethnic and cultural differences were aimed to be eliminated until the new Soviet identity would be created. Therefore, Central Asian women were seen as biological reproducers, but not as “as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; and/or as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups” but as biological reproducers of the new Soviet socialist society. As one of the basic aims of the regime was to eliminate ethnic and national differences, they did not see Central Asian women as “signifier of ethnic/national differences.” But, it does not mean that the Soviet regime ignored these differences, there was awareness about them and the Soviet officials tried to suppress such differences by propagating one united Soviet society with socialist ideals.

It is obvious that one of the basic aims of the Soviet regime was to create a socialist state and implement necessary policies for its survival. For the well being of the regime, new generations’ belief to socialism was the key. So, the mothers in the Soviet Union, especially the ones living in Muslim areas, were expected to raise their children with the Soviet ideals so that future generations would be the guardians of the regime. Therefore, women in Central Asia definitely were treated as “central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture.”

In addition, Soviet officials worked hard to make Central Asian women active in political and economic life. The regime determined policies and made efforts to open ways for the participation of women in every sphere of life. They really wanted them to be free and equal with men. They wanted Central Asian

⁵⁶⁴ Ashwin, S. (2000). Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. In S. Ashwin *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London: Routledge, p.3.

women to understand, support and, if necessary, fight for the Soviet ideals. So, it can be said that the regime perceived Central Asian women as “participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles.”

The regime also wanted Central Asian women to be freed from domestic and traditional “chains” that prevented them from being active in the public area. However, it seems as if they failed to see the whole picture clearly and did not understand the points that would actually make Central Asian women suffer heavily. The implementation of female emancipation policies were so radical and put into effect so drastically and quickly that it resulted in the creation of negative image regarding the Soviet regime. It seemed as if the Soviets aimed to destroy every aspect of Central Asian women’s lives.

It is understandable that a regime such as the Soviet regime had the ideals of creating a socialist society with the goals of equality among sexes and among all people in terms of economic, political and social areas would want to reform and change the traditional patterns in Central Asia where women were defined only as mother and wives. So, this study argues that the Soviet regime was sincere about its goals in terms of emancipation of women. However, as explained in the previous chapters in detail, certain domestic and international circumstances forced the Soviet leaders to modify or revise their gender policies. So, the intentions of the Soviet regime had been changed and shaped, sometimes in contradiction with each other in accordance with the needs of the time.

In this sense, the real intentions of the Soviet Union can be discussed in four perspectives. First, as Chatterjee argues, there could be ideological reasons behind the Soviet gender policies such as emphasizing the unique characteristics of the Soviet Union. Second, as Ishkanian argues, it could be because of preparing ground for socialist transformation. Third, as Lubin, Ayata and Acar indicate, it could be for providing participation to labor force. Fourth, as Massell argues, it could be for mobilizing society for the survival of the Soviet Union. In this study, it is argued that these factors are not mutually exclusive. At some points, the

Soviet regime wanted them all. However, the main focus of the regime shifted from one intention to another depending on the circumstances. In the very first years of the Soviet regime, gender policies had been implemented mostly to achieve the ideological and mobilizing goals of the regime. Then, during the Stalin era, especially during the late 1930s and 1940s, the main focus of gender policies was about participation to the labor as Stalin wanted the regime to survive economically and to take part among the economically developed countries. In terms of the relationship between gender policies and consolidating power, in the Central Asia, it was almost always the case that Soviet officials used gender policies to strengthen their power and the legitimacy of the regime.

Whether being motivated by the goal of making women an important political and economic force of the system, or by the intention of transforming them in terms of creating a new Soviet identity, the Soviet officials believed that eliminating local and regional identities, and freeing women from traditional responsibilities through education, labor force participation, and political activeness would lead to the weakening of patriarchal structures, and the emancipation of women.⁵⁶⁵ It was a plan that made sense in theory but in the practice everything did not end up as they had been expected to end up. The changes put into effect by the Soviet Union did not result in the elimination of local cultural patterns.⁵⁶⁶ As Massell explains:

The drama of modernization in Soviet Central Asia thus arose from a huge gap between the social structures existing and those envisioned; from the lack of significantly disintegrated structures ready-made for refashioning;

⁵⁶⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.95.

⁵⁶⁶ Kandiyoti, D. (2007). The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?. *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (4), p.606.

and from great verve and urgency on one side and a deep imperviousness to manipulation on the other.⁵⁶⁷

The results of the Soviet gender policies would therefore produce mixed results. There were many different reasons for this outcome. First, the laws by themselves could not be expected to solve those problems that Soviet officials had believed to originate from the centuries-old traditions and religious customs in Central Asia. Maybe, gradually, Central Asian people might have been used to the new rules and laws. However, the intense and quick changes made them to think that there was an assault to their way of life. So, the new laws remained mostly in the theory in the long run. Second, different points of view between the Soviet officials and Central Asian people as well as different points of view among the former group itself, made the picture more complicated, and every small step taken for solving the woman issue became vital for the survival of the regime in the region. Third, there was a failure to establish a common ground or to find a middle way. The daily life practices and customs of the Central Asians were unacceptable for the Soviet policy makers and the reforms initiated by the regime were perceived as destructive, creating resentment among the local population. Therefore, it was difficult to eliminate all such practices and customs that defined Central Asian way of life. It was even more difficult for the local people to see their customs as “crimes”.⁵⁶⁸ Fourth, the family, as the basic unit of analysis, was shaped according to the needs of the time and the policies of the leaders. It was also used for the justification of Soviet policies regarding emancipation of women. For example, in 1934, when preservation of the family structure was seen to be necessary on the basis of economic policies, Stalin emphasized the family as

⁵⁶⁷ Massell, G. J. (1968). Law as an Instrument of Revolutionary Change in a Traditional Milieu: The Case of Soviet Central Asia. *Law & Society Review*, 2 (2), p.183.

⁵⁶⁸ Edgar, A. L. (2003). Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29. *Russian Review*, 62 (1), p.142.

the basic unit of a socialist society. This declaration aimed at preserving families, decreasing divorces and abortions, and therefore increase the population.⁵⁶⁹ So, complicated and inconsistent policies limited the possibility of Soviet officials to reach to Central Asian women. Fifth, there was a lack of real communication between the Central Asian people and the Soviet officials, who presented the “problems” related to the woman question within their own ideological perspectives. From their own way of thinking, what was assumed by the Soviet Union made perfect sense. While emphasizing the subordinate position of women, and the traditional and religious customs that oppressed them, the Soviet leaders wanted to turn women into independent individuals in all spheres of life. However, they failed to understand the fact that the problems they defined were not necessarily actual problems in these traditional societies. It seems like they wrote their own scenario, and they acted according to it. As such, the reasons behind the oppression of women according to the Soviet authorities were mostly not making much sense for the local people. Most Central Asian women could not think that their traditions would be assumed to have repressive characteristics. Therefore, a different method, based on the views of the regional people should have been created. Maybe, with more moderate and dialogue based policies, the status of women could have been more improved, and this improvement could have been more permanent after the dissolution of Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Soviet regime had emancipated Central Asian women in several ways, especially through education and participation to labor force. The regime initiated certain changes which influenced Central Asian women. The major success of the Soviet regime was to provide the opportunities for that women guaranteed their participation to social, political and cultural life through economic independence, education and employment.

⁵⁶⁹ Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2004). Whose Security? State-Building and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia. *International Relations*, 18 (1), p.97.

However, what seemed to be missing in the region was the lack of a real understanding of the Soviet regime. The local people did not know anything about socialism; they did not think about the consequences of socialism, they did not grasp the reason behind the reforms on gender emancipation. In addition to that, the Soviet policy makers did not know much about either Islam or the local traditions. Furthermore they did not try to understand the social and cultural importance of these traditions for the Central Asian people. Therefore, it was like two blind people trying to recognize each other, while not speaking.

Needless to say, creating a socialist state was a difficult task and certain prices had to be paid. However, initially at least, the price that women had to pay was much more than they could afford. Therefore, they turned out to be the victims of the tension between the Soviet ideology and local traditions. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries turned to their pre-Soviet pasts and started to revive those pre-Soviet traditions that seem to be more and more effective in these societies.

As a final point, it should also be mentioned that the gap or discrepancy between theory and practice in the Soviet regime in the gender area could be observed in other walks of life as well. As such, the contradictions seen in Soviet nationalities or religious policies also had this kind of discrepancy. The whole social engineering project including the gender issues adopted by Soviet system inevitably had such mixed results.

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Bölümü : Avrasya Çalışmaları

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