THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL GENDER IDEOLOGIES IN THE EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN IN POST SOVIET UZBEKISTAN

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the Center for International Studies of Ohio University

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

Mohira R. Kurbanova

June 2005
This thesis entitled

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL GENDER IDEOLOGIES IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN POST SOVIET UZBEKISTAN

BY

MOHIRA R. KURBANOVA

Has been approved for

The Department of International Development Studies

and The Center for International Studies by

Ann R. Tickamyer

Director, International Development Studies

Josep Rota

Director, Center for International Studies
The Role of Traditional Gender Ideologies in the Empowerment of Women in Post
Soviet Uzbekistan (102 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Ann R. Tickamyer

Independent Uzbekistan is a relatively gender-equal society where women and
men of all ages have similar access to economic and social benefits and political
facilities. However, there have been clear and consistent gender-based patterns in
employment and traditional household responsibilities despite the social and gender equal
society claimed during Soviet rule. Today women are more “restricted” to the patriarchal
domain than in the past, and constitute the majority of the impoverished in the country.

Based on library research and qualitative data analysis this paper examines
following questions: 1) how has the status of women changed under Post Soviet
Uzbekistan? 2) what are the roles of traditional culture and new “nationalization” policies
on women’ opportunities and choices? 3) what is the perception of women as regards to
their roles and responsibilities in society? 4) what is the future impact of gender roles in
Uzbekistan?

The study argues that women’s motivation and choices are based on their cultural
milieu and traditional values rather than economic and political opportunities, and that
education alone will not be effective in promoting a gender equal society.

This study will contribute to women’s empowerment efforts in Uzbekistan by
serving as a home-grown participatory approach to counterbalance the top-down
bureaucratic approach of state agencies as well as policies prescribed from abroad by
foreign donors on women’s issues. The findings of the research study will be accessible
for public use and can be used by the government as well as international non profit
organizations in the process of developing strategies to address women’s issues in the
Islamic society of Uzbekistan.

Approved:

Ann R. Tickamyer
Director of International Development Studies
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my Graduate Committee Dr. Elizabeth Collins and Dr. Francis Godwyll for their invaluable input and suggestions throughout the writing of this paper and a special thank you to my advisor Dr. Ann Tickamyer for her invaluable advice, the insightful conversations we shared concerning the content of this thesis, and the hours she spent editing this work.

Additionally I would like to extend my gratitude to all the great people I met and spoke with during the course of my field research in Ferghana Uzbekistan, especially all the women whose lived experiences and sincere conversations contributed to the richness of this work. I’m indebted to my mother whose life and dreams inspired me to write about the women of Uzbek nation.
Table of Contents

Abstract..................................................................................................................................................3
Acknowledgements..............................................................................................................................4
Table of Contents................................................................................................................................5
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................7
List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................7

Chapter 1. Introduction
Historical Background ..........................................................................................................................8
Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................................................11
Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................................13
Research Questions ..............................................................................................................................13
Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................................14

Chapter 2. Literature Review
Pre Revolution: Traditional Gender Ideologies .................................................................................16
  i. Islam. Women’s morality................................................................................................................18
Surrogate Proletariats of the Soviet Uzbekistan ..................................................................................20
  ii. Backlash against enforced “emancipation” of women .................................................................24
Women in Post Soviet Uzbekistan ......................................................................................................28
  iii. The Role of the State in promoting women’s interest: Traditionalism or Egalitarianism? ..........28
  iv. Revisiting traditional gender ideology in Uzbek society: Culture and Family and Role of Islam ..............................................................................................................................32
  v. Economic status of women in the transition period.................................................................37
  vi. Dilemma...................................................................................................................................40

Chapter 3. Research Study
Methodology ..........................................................................................................................................45
Design: Qualitative research method, snowball sampling..................................................................46
Characteristics of Sample Population ..................................................................................................48
Method ..................................................................................................................................................51
Research tools:
  i. Intensive Interview.......................................................................................................................53
  ii. Group Interviews .........................................................................................................................55
  iii. Participant Observation ...............................................................................................................56
  iv. Document Collection ..................................................................................................................57
  v. Analysis of Data............................................................................................................................58
List of Figures

1. Figure 2.1. Growth of Female literary rate in Uzbekistan during Soviet Union .............21
2. Figure 2.2. Population Growth (Annual %) 1970-2003 ..............................................24
3. Figure 2.3. Economic fields with prevalent representation of women in Soviet Uzbekistan 1983 ..........................................................25
4. Figure 2.4. Distribution of Female Labor Force by Sector in Post Soviet Uzbekistan, 1999 .................................................................................................................39
5. Figure 4.5. How has the situation changed for women in Post Soviet Uzbekistan? ......71
6. Figure 4.6. Responses of 46 women in Ferghana Region, 2005 .....................................74

List of Tables

1. Table 3.1. Division of women leaders into groups by age ..............................................49
2. Table 3.2. Population Sample Characteristics ..............................................................50
3. Table 4.3 What do you think about men having more than one wife or a family? ..........65
4. Table 4.4. Can a woman become a president of Uzbekistan? ......................................76
CHAPTER 1

Introduction. Historical Background

The birth of Uzbekistan as a nation state in 1991 draws upon a multi-layered heritage of ancient Turkic traditions, Islam, and Communism as it was understood and practiced in the Soviet Union. Present-day Uzbekistan is esteemed as the centre of great empires and civilizations. As a “nationality” in the modern sense, the Uzbeks are a product of the Stalinist drive to create Soviet Socialist Republics incorporating a host of imposed political and socio-cultural norms. However, the term “Uzbek” reaches back to the middle ages, chiefly as a tribal classification\(^1\) (Allworth, 1990). The history of the people and the land date back to the Transoxiana regime of the third century B.C. Alexander the Great passed through this land during the fourth century B.C. where he married a native - Roxana. The ancient cities of Bukhara and Samarkand served as principal way stations on the Great Silk Road connecting Eurasia with the Far East. Arab invasions brought Islam to the region and a flourishing of the arts and sciences, including the birth of modern day Algebra. Progress abruptly ended in the early thirteenth century with the arrival of Mongol invaders. Later on the native Turk- Mongol ruler, Tamerlane, built his Islamic Empire based in the ancient city of Samarkand, invading as far as India, Syria and southern Russia. Having witnessed invasions, conquests & empires, contemporary Uzbekistan is in a process of building a democratic civil society with a great emphasis on reconstructed national identity (Melvin, 2000; Hunter, 1996; Rashid, 1994).

Bordered by four of the former Soviet Central Asian republics as well as Afghanistan, Uzbekistan plays a vital strategic and political role in the region. Uzbekistan ranks as the most populous nation in Central Asia with a population of 25.5 million.

\(^1\) Allworth Edward 1990 “Modern Uzbeks” Stanford (Hoover Institution Press)
Despite 88% of the inhabitants being adherents of Sunni Islam (World Bank Data, 2003), the state and the constitution are secular. The population is young and dynamic with 56% under the age of 25 (UNDP\textsuperscript{2}) and an average age of 23.9 years (Melvin, 2000), with only 7% of the population in retirement age (World Fact Book, 2003). The gender ratio stands at 51 females to 49 males and more than half the women are of reproductive age (ADB\textsuperscript{3} report, 1998). According to the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics of Uzbekistan, 57% of all families have five or more children. Over 60% of the population lives in rural areas, mainly engaged in agriculture and livestock (Karimov, 2001). Agriculture continues to be an important sector of the economy employing 40% of the workforce and accounting for 60% of total exports; 30.2% of the GDP is generated by irrigated agriculture. Quality of life as well as the well-being of the population is heavily dependent on irrigated agriculture which accounts for approximately 95% of the available arable land. It is the major source of rural employment and the primary source of income for farms. (UN country assessment, 2003) While the official language is Uzbek, Russian is widely spoken, especially among the literate urbane circles. In the field of education, reform is underway to fully change the Cyrillic script to Latin by the year 2005. The official literacy rate stands at an impressive 99% for both men and women (World Development Report, 2003). Uzbekistan is divided into 12 official administrative provinces as well as the autonomic republic of Karakalpakistan lying to the west.

Since the acquisition of independence, the country’s transition from a centrally planned to a market economy has followed a unique path, in defiance of the textbook transitions prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This

\textsuperscript{2} United Nations Development Program
\textsuperscript{3} Asian Development Bank
homegrown approach has enabled a moderate but sustained annual GDP\(^4\) growth rate ranging from 3.5% to 4.0%, making Uzbekistan the lone former Soviet republic in 2001 to surpass its pre-independence level GDP (UNDP, 2003).

The Ferghana Valley, situated in the northwest of the country, was renowned as the “Pearl of Uzbekistan” during Soviet rule, and is the nation’s most densely populated region accounting for almost a third of the population. The diamond-shaped valley stretches 300 km from east to west and 170 km from north to south. The valley's opulence builds upon its thousand year old history and its legacy of master craftsmen in silk, ceramics, woodcarving and a bevy of other ancient arts. Ferghana Valley consists of three provinces: Namangan, Andijan and Ferghana and its territory spans three countries with enclaves in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Ferghana province, where the research study was conducted, lies in the southern gates of the Valley with a population of about 2,597,000 and is divided into 15 administrative districts. More than 70% of the total population resides in rural areas and engages in agricultural production. The administrative center is Ferghana town with about 214,000 inhabitants; it is the youngest town in the Valley, established by the Russian imperial army in 1876 during the period of intensifying influence of Russia in remote parts of Central Asia. The region ranks second in the nation in terms of industrial output. The economy of the region is based on agriculture, mainly cotton growing, sericulture, horticulture and grape growing. The province registers the highest rate of unemployment in the country at 17.1%\(^5\). Women constitute the majority of the agrarian

\(^4\) Gross Domestic Product
\(^5\) The Times of Central Asia published 27-11-2004 [www.times.kg](http://www.times.kg)
underpaid farmers, casual laborers as well as the illegal petty traders in the informal sectors of the transitional market.

Ferghana is a strategically and politically important region of Uzbekistan. From the Soviet times until the present day, Ferghana has stood out as the nation’s center of Islamic traditions and practices and its people are acknowledged as the most religious within Uzbekistan. Issues associated with economic hardship such as inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities, obstacles to economic activity, and disputed access to key resources constitute the major source of tension in the province (UNFVDP). Ferghana has served as the pilot region for many international and donor organizations to launch assessment projects.

**Statement of the Problem**

Independent Uzbekistan is considered a relatively gender–equal society, where women and men of all ages have similar access to economic and social benefits and political facilities. Despite steady decreases in child mortality and population growth rates, enhanced reproductive health coverage, increased female school enrollment and high female literacy rates, women are now more “restricted” to the patriarchal domain than in the past. Although the Uzbek nation lived through a socialist system that advocated gender equality, there existed clear and consistent gender-based patterns in employment and traditional household responsibilities.

To address issues pertaining to gender inequality, the new Uzbek government introduced and enforced a host of specialized programs, laws and social protection plans for women and children, promoting women’s role and identity. Several research reports

---

6 United Nations Ferghana Valley Development Project
have been published on the effects of economic transitions on women’s status in Uzbekistan. Efforts of the nation state, international agencies and non governmental organizations to empower women through employment and education, laws and social incentives are recorded in reports and country analyses. However, there is a widening gap in gender inequality in all aspects of life in present day Uzbekistan.

While the gender issues pertaining to Uzbekistan are neither unique nor unheard of in other parts of the world, women’s image and status in Uzbekistan has been co-constructed by a distinctive mix of socio-political factors as well as historical and behavioral elements. According to research findings by ethnographic studies conducted in UNDP projects in Uzbekistan, there is no correlation between the percentage of women choosing education and the number of children they have or the type of job they engage in. The obstacles for women to have equal opportunities in society are more cultural rather than due to lack of economic and political opportunities. Even though Islam is not strictly observed in Uzbekistan, many traditional views and practices are upheld with respect to religion and faith.

Nonetheless, one would be misguided to think of Uzbek women as a passive and oppressed group, comprising little more than the tools of corporate capitalism and the guinea pigs of development experts. As stressed in many reports presented by research institutions and international organizations, there is a need to “investigate women’s status in the economic, political, social, cultural, educational, scientific and traditional spheres of the country’s life; additionally there is a need for practical recommendations and design mechanisms for the realization of these goals to enhance the role of women in the ongoing democratic transformation.”(Status of Women, 1999)
Purpose of the Study

As reported in the UN Ferghana Valley Development Project, the Ferghana Valley is a critical region for Central Asia as a whole, and what happens in the Ferghana Valley—for better or worse—has widespread ramifications for the region as a whole (FVDP, 2004).

The Ferghana province of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the field site selected to conduct qualitative research study. Many feminists suggest that we study individuals as socially constructed subjects or actors and focus on moments of their lived experiences, specifically their resistance to their conditions of subordination (Trethewey, 1997). Collecting qualitative data from the interviews with individuals and groups of women from different parts of the region and of different social backgrounds is an essential tool to gather first hand information on the range of attitudes toward gender roles. Against the backdrop of national and international statistics mapping women’s role in the economy, in this study, Uzbek women recount their perceptions and experiences of changes in women’s status in Post Soviet Uzbekistan as lived. The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of traditional gender roles in Uzbekistan, and to observe the transformation of national identity through shifts in gender power in Post Soviet Uzbekistan.

This study assumes the revival of predominantly traditional viewpoints and changes in the perceptions of women’s role in society, especially by women themselves.

Research Questions

This research is inspired by the 2002 report on “Women’s Status in Uzbekistan” conducted by the Gender and Development Research Center of the United Nations Development Program in Uzbekistan. The significant aspect of this study is the
formulation of appropriate research questions that are easy to understand. This leads readily to open discussion by women representing various economic sectors and societal backgrounds. Simultaneously it involves them in the complex process of transforming their every day lived experiences into analytical data. The data collected from these interviews were used to understand women’s perception of their own role and status in society, as well as to explore the effect that traditional views of women have on their daily lives and choices. The principal findings of this study will be constructed around the following research questions:

1. How has the status of women changed under Post Soviet Uzbekistan?
2. What are the roles of traditional culture and new “nationalization” policies on women’s opportunities and choices?
3. What is the perception of women as regards to their roles and responsibilities in society?
4. What is the future impact of gender roles in Uzbekistan?

**Significance of the Study**

Gender Empowerment has been included as one of the key Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations and Uzbekistan. This fact itself demonstrates the essential role of women in development. Empowerment of women is necessary to build a democratic, civil society, to develop a market economy, and to tackle health and environment issues. However, the reality on the ground is unfavorable to the accomplishment of these goals in many developing nations. Spiraling poverty is widening the gender inequality gap which has led to the conception of the “feminization of poverty”. This term doesn’t have nationality or location, but has gender. Sen and Growth
(1987) argue that while women constitute the majority of the poor and are the most economically and socially disadvantaged, it is their work that provides food, water, and energy in many parts of the world. Therefore, development planning should begin from the standpoint of poor women. Uzbekistan is not different in this regard.

This study will contribute to women’s empowerment efforts in Uzbekistan: the findings of the research study will have significant weight in analyzing women’s perception of gender roles within traditional gender norms. Results and findings of the study can be used by government, international and non profit organizations that have placed women’s issues on their development agenda.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review. Pre Revolution: Traditional Gender Ideology

Women’s position in the history of the Central Asian region, the former colonial periphery of imperial Russia, was mostly determined by “the strict traditions and canons of Islam” (Alimova and Azimova 2000 ed. by Acar et.al). Behind the thick “paranjda”\(^7\) (translation: veil), Uzbek women lived in a closed world encapsulated by four walls, ostracized from productive labor and socio-political activities, serving as the bearers of Islamic traditions in a feudal society (Saktanber, 1997 ed. by Acar et al).

While most Uzbeks were agriculturists and led a sedentary life, some continued to retain a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence in the pre-revolutionary period. The social class system was divisive and rigid, divided among the wealthy descendents of the Khans and Islamic adherents of the Prophet, and their impoverished slaves and servants who comprised the masses (Jochelson, 1928). Polygamy among men and unequal marriages between young child-brides and older men was generally accepted among both the rich and poor (Alimova, 1984). Brides were often bid upon, representing the repressive nature of pre-Islamic patriarchal traditions that reduced women to pseudo-slaves. Marriage took place only after “qalim” (translation: the price of the bride) was paid. As a result of an imbalanced gender ratio in favor of men,\(^8\) the bride price was so high that only the affluent minority could afford the privileges of polygamy, while many men often remained single (Jochelson, 1928). Being a widow was more oppressive than being married, neither of which posed a solution to their state of oppression. The acceptable age of marriage for girls was nine (Kamp, 1998) and there were many cases when girls were

\(^7\) An enveloping gown with a close-woven net of horsehair that hardly lets the light through
\(^8\) 886 women per 1000 in pre revolutionary Uzbekistan Kamp, 1998
sold as brides at the age of seven and eight in poor families (Aminova, 1985). Young girls spent their childhood preparing for marriage and the remainder of their married lives nurturing children and serving their spouses and the extended family. Their mothers and older sisters would teach them how to manage the household and basic skills such as sewing, knitting, weaving, spinning wool etc. to raise their “value” as a bride (Saktanber, et al, 1997). Tending livestock, gardening, cleaning, cooking, raising children, selling handicraft products, looking after the extended families of the spouse were the traditional responsibilities of women.

Women’s collective life centered on participation in family events, family ties, decision-making processes concerning child nurturing, and organization of their private life, all of which were heavily influenced by their respective age structure. They were the ones who appeared as keepers of traditional customs and rituals. The man’s role was mainly to provide financial support for the family and deal with all issues that arose outside the domestic realm. Nalivkins reported that in the 1880s, women would rarely appear in the bazaar to sell their own hand spun cotton threads, although some women sold their products directly to other households (Nalivkin, 1924). Women, much more so than men, have preserved cultural and religious traditions incorporating both Islamic and pre-Islamic elements (Saktanber, 1997 in ed. by Acar et al.). They played the principal role in maintaining the honor and dignity of their families; they carried out all the domestic chores in addition to their work in the field. In the public sphere, women in pre-Revolutionary Uzbekistan were confined to the most undesirable menial tasks that were shunned by men. Veiled in public and segregated from the male domain, women did not aspire to participate in trade or public life, nor was it regarded as appropriate for them to
do so. Rather, they were confined to agricultural work in the fields and/or domestic work at home (Lubin, 1984).

While Central Asian women were by and large excluded from factories and workshops, a 1887 census highlights 57,504 Muslim women in the province of Ferghana designated as engaged in independent occupations; this represents 10.7% of all Central Asian women (Kamp, 1998). While the oppression of women may be somewhat exaggerated, the observations of nineteenth century travelers to Turkistan (present day Central Asian republics) are nonetheless revealing in this regard: “While the poor women are fatiguing themselves with their laborious occupation… their lord and master are accustomed to snore through their noonday siesta” (Lubin, 1984). When poverty was overwhelming, women sought paid work either in the agricultural sector or as domestic help. While domestic work was relatively easy to find, it placed women in a morally compromising situation as they had to interact with men outside their own household (Kamp, 1998).

i. Islam. Women’s morality

Traditionally women spent most of their lives within the “ichkari” (translation: inside) of the home, which narrowed their circle of acquaintances as well as the possibility for coming into contact with contemporary trends and ideas. Olcott argued that no statistical data is needed to describe the female literacy rate as there were no official schools for girls up to the 1920s (Olcott, 1995). According to Kamp, female literacy rate in 1887 averaged less than one percent in regions of Ferghana, Syrdarya, and Samarkand prior to the revolution. The highest rates of literacy among Muslim women
were found in cities in the cohort of girls aged 9-19\(^9\) (Kamp, 1998). “Jadids” (translation: Muslim reformers) in the pre-revolutionary period led the movement for gender equality and secular education as a necessary step for the renewal and progress of the nation. They fought against conservative societal elements that reacted to the imperialist Russian conquest of the 1860s-70s by reinforcing traditional norms of female seclusion and veiling (Adeeb, 1998). They argued that only through reforming and redefining the role of women in family life could Muslim societies overcome imperialist denigration. Some religious clergies agreed with the benefits of reforms and advocated teaching women how to write and attain a basic knowledge of Islamic laws, rights and duties. They justified their actions on the grounds that it made them better mothers and responsible wives. However concerns abounded amongst the majority of conservatives as regards to women’s moral nature and innate intelligence. These concerns covered a broad spectrum, from adherents of male guardianship who believed that men were responsible for securing women’s morality through secluding them and limiting their contact with harmful persons and ideas, to those who asserted that women’s moral agency could be controlled and empowered through extensive education (Kamp, 1998). Unfortunately, most women were themselves generally sympathetic to their state of “oppression” and supported the preservation of their customs, roles and traditions.

\(^{9}\) Source: First General Census of the Population of the Russian Empire, 1987, vol. 86
**Surrogate Proletariats of Soviet Uzbekistan**

Following the success of the Socialist Revolution in 1917, the new Communist administration sponsored socio-political-economic policies designed to place women on an equal footing with men, through the mobilization of women’s movements in Central Asia. Contrary to western nations where feminism had been a movement led by women for women, transformation in Uzbekistan occurred under the aegis of a colonial government (Doi, 2002). Women were targeted as “surrogate proletariat” to lead the vanguard of reforms and to undermine the deeply rooted networks of kinship and traditionalism (Massell, 1974). Observers who wrote about Muslim women in Central Asia during the mid-1920s had the pre-determined objective of demonstrating that women were powerless and oppressed, presenting the most horrific examples of oppression as the norm, and ignoring or negating the cultural spheres within which women had a relative degree of agency and power (Kamp, 1998). Therefore, social revolution was stressed with the objective of ushering dramatic changes in the lives of Central Asian women, through the removal of the veil, discouraging early and arranged marriages, & forcing women into mainstream education and the job market. These efforts were centralized through the launching of an offensive political movement in 1927 titled the “Hujdum”\(^{10}\)(translation: attack) (see Kamp, 1998; Alimova, 1985 etc). Unveiling and providing access to education was the means by which the position of women was to be changed and traditional values, especially religious values, transformed (Melvin, 2000). The introduction of compulsory education quickly raised the rate of female

\(^{10}\) the onslaught against the old ways, prepared by persistent Party work among women workers and peasants
literacy. The Soviet administration harped upon the success of female educational programs to justify wide-ranging reforms in the region.

(Figure 2.1) Growth of Female Literacy Rate in Uzbekistan during Soviet Union

Meticulous implementation of Lenin’s first five year plan for women’s emancipation (Alimova, 1983) raised the female literacy rate from 3.8% in 1926 to 52.5% in 1932 (Melvin, 2000). The percentage of women in higher education also increased dramatically within a short period. Data from 1982 shows the percentage of female students in institutions of higher learning at 43% and 51% in secondary vocational learning institutions (Avanesov, 1983). However, critiques argue that the educational system fostered by the Soviet regime failed to cultivate independent thinking and was of
questionable quality. Others argue that the curriculum was unambiguously tailored
towards the 5% of non-ethnic students residing in Soviet Uzbekistan (Reed, 2002). There
existed a great disparity between the percentage of indigenous Uzbek women engaged in
education, politics and administration, as compared to non-ethnics (see Alimova, 1983).

Unveiling however, became a ritual act that had both personal and political
significance for the women who chose to unveil, and for those who persuaded others to
follow suit. Dramatic acts of public unveiling demonstrated women’s identification with
the new Soviet state; their subversion was symbolic of their loyalty to their new master –
the Communist Party.¹¹ Among the thousands who rejected the norms of Islamic culture
by unveiling in public, hundreds were murdered between 1927 and 1929 by local people
who resisted Soviets, often their own fathers and brothers. The unveilings and their
resultant social backlash symbolized women’s transition into full citizenry¹² (Kamp,
2002).

Soviet literature argues that the revolutionary socio–cultural transformation
brought about by the October Revolution deserves credit for increasing women’s
education level and economic participation. In the initial years following the launch of

¹¹ Judith Butler discusses gender identification as performative, leading to the possibility that other forms of
identification, such as national identity, may also be performative. She sees that potential for agency within
the variation of the repeated acts and performances that establish the social meaning of gender. The
dramatic performances of unveiling in Uzbekistan raise complex questions concerning identity and agency
and the possibility of subversion or resistance: Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the
Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 141-45

¹² Actual figures are disputed; Scholars have given numbers for those murdered for unveiling that range
from several hundred to multiple thousands. See also Shoshana Keller, “Trapped Between State and
Uzbekistan, 1927-41”, Russian Review 59 (2000) 179-200
“Hudjum”, the process of advocating “unveiling”, granting women titles to lands\textsuperscript{13}, raising the minimum age of marriage from 9 to 16, reserving certain positions for female candidates in the job market, and establishing women’s clubs and committees, collectively played a critical role in combating the oppressive culture of veiling. Women were also encouraged to be activists in the political arena. In 1927, 13\% of the members (and candidates) of the Uzbekistan Communist Party were women. While only 2.5\% of the women were ethnic Uzbeks, their overall representation was highly supported. In 1933, women made up 14\%, in 1936, 15.7\% and in 1976, 22\% in the Communist Party \textsuperscript{14} (Kamp, 2002). The state provided women with significant benefits such as maternity leave for up to three years, pension entitlements, and early retirement for those who had five or more children (which was the case for 57\% of the families according to the 1989 census) (Pomfret et al., 1997).

\textsuperscript{13}In the land reforms of 1925-1926, the Uzbek women who obtained land were almost exclusively widows - N. "Yer islahatida xotin-qizlar qatnashi" [Women and girls' participation in land reform], Qizil O'zbekiston, March 8, 1926

\textsuperscript{14}“Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Uzbekistana v Tsifrakh”, Tashkent Uzbekistan 1979
Generous welfare provisions made it easier for women to simultaneously play the dual role of mother and worker, the main purpose of which was to incorporate them into the party and politicize them (Luong, 2004). In 1934, the “women’s question” was declared to be resolved, and organizations ceased advocating for women’s issues. (Luong, 2004; also see Aminova, 1977; Massell, 1974; Kamp, 1998).

ii. Backlash against women’s “emancipation”

Forcefully imposed emancipation had its own tragic results: policies of using women as cheap labor alongside men placed them in the production line where the most important indicator was quantity (Alimova, 1985). Women’s workload was equated with men in terms of work hours and productivity expectations, in addition to their burgeoning household chores (Alimova et al., 2000).
By the early 1980s approximately 50% of all industrial workers in the sphere of communication and agriculture were women. From 1960-1982, the number of women workers and employees rose threefold, representing 43% of the national workforce (Alimova, 1985), particularly in the fields illustrated in the chart above. Membership in collective farms eventually turned women into the main source of unskilled labor in this sector and contributed to their attainment of equal rights as workers (Kamp, 1998). Manual cotton picking was (and still remains) a primarily female domain\(^\text{15}\) and 50%-75% of family income of workers in this sector came from female labor (Alimdjanova, 2002).

\(^{15}\) In 1980s cotton farmers in Uzbekistan received 16 kopeyk an hour. The monthly wage for cotton pickers in Uzbekistan was 50 roubles, four times less than the national average (Melvin 2000, 92)
Women, particularly in rural areas suffered from poor health conditions and high infant mortality due to the cotton monoculture imposed by Soviet system (Alimova et al. 2000). Many women, regardless of their social status, suffered from depression, wrestling with the imposed dual responsibility of working the same hours as men outside their homes, while carrying out their familial obligations at home. One result has been an alarming incidence of female suicide, especially self-immolation (Critchlow, 1991).

Seven decades of Soviet rule have failed to fully integrate women in the political and economic life of Uzbekistan. As a whole, Central Asian society has changed, but the role of women within their communities in general have not. Although women could expect to receive the same education as their male counterparts, they were almost always excluded from performing leadership roles in their societies. The patriarchal power-structure at home failed to change following women's entry into the workplace, and the upper reaches of power remained closed to women (Cooper, 2003). While the ideal of small, egalitarian families was being promoted by Soviet modernizers, ethnographers (such as Poliakov, 1992 and Snesarev, 1974) documented the persistence of large, patriarchal families, the marriage of underage girls, and the payment of dowries (*kalim*).

Kandiyoti argued that the survival of these so-called traditions was in fact bolstered by the Soviet command economy which restricted labor mobility and inadvertently reinforced the preference for large families (Kandiyoti, 1996). Women’s employment remained secondary to their family responsibilities; consequently, they would work only in those jobs that were compatible with their primary roles in the families.

This statement is especially applicable in the case of rural women. Freed from veiling, women were still considered inferior to compete with their male counterparts in
socio-economic-political realm. Even urban intellectuals believed that it was unbecoming for women to occupy leadership positions as it implied exercising authority over men (Poliakov, 1992). In some ways, restrictions imposed on practicing religion may have been the reason why Central Asians strongly preserved traditional practices as the sole means of demonstrating respect for their faith (Olcott, 1995). Emphasis on women’s role in child rearing, combined with extended maternity leave and subsidies in the form of direct payments to mothers with young children, contributed to the prevalent tendency to not question gender roles but to perpetuate women’s dependency on men and on the state (Luong, 2004). Nearly 65,000 women in Uzbekistan were honored with the title “Mother Heroine”16 by the Soviet state. Approximately a million women were decorated with the “Maternal Glory” order and “Medal of Motherhood” (Avanesov, 1983).

The immutability of gender roles, and the primacy of motherhood in woman’s lives, all supported by Soviet ideology, fit well with Uzbek cultural attitudes toward gender roles and did not challenge them at all (Kamp, 2004). Discourse that was liberating at that time set up limitations for women of more recent generations (Najmabadi, 1998). Previously indisputable universal educational gains of the 1960s and 1970s may also be questioned as gender and ethnic data were either not available or were not disaggregated. Furthermore, concerns have risen from the fact that emancipation was perceived to have been conducted forcefully and in disregard of local traditions and customs (Promfret, et al, 1997).

Changing governmental structures and political forms expanded Uzbek women’s dependency on the state (Kamp, 2004) and increased their vulnerability to poverty after

---

16 Title awarded for women with more than 10 children during Soviet Uzbekistan.
the collapse of the Soviet welfare system. When women were finally integrated into the economic system of Uzbekistan, the country remained the most impoverished among the Soviet republics with 44.7% of the population below the poverty line in 1988, while the overall percentage for the Soviet Union was 6.3%. High rates of maternal and infant mortality and the never ending dual burden on women were characteristic of Soviet Uzbek women. In 1986, when Russia was officially at full employment, the unemployment rate in Uzbekistan was 23%, of which 90% were rural women (Verral, 1997).

**Women in Post Soviet Uzbekistan**

Similar to other post Soviet republics, Uzbekistan paid a high cost for the economic transition that brought major changes affecting women, directly through the labor market and indirectly through the erosion of social protection and the social service delivery system. While most of the policies were targeted to reach growth on a macroeconomic level, the result has been a widening gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty throughout the past decade. As Saktanber notes, the states are shaped by gender struggles (Acar ed. et al. 2000). Similarly, in the nation building process, gender plays an important role insofar as it is central to the self-definition of social groups (also see Parpat and Staudt 1990; McClintock, 1993; Sharp, 1996; Anderson, 1983; and Moghadam, 1994).

 iii. The Role of the State in promoting women’s interest: Traditionalism or Egalitarianism?

Contradictory assessments of the meaning of the Soviet Legacy for Uzbek women continue to generate debates on the contemporary status of women in society. In restoring
its national traditions, Uzbekistan sought to differentiate itself from its manifestation under its former ruler in order to reconstruct its own identity (Chatterjee, 1990-93). These efforts were reflected in a whole range of decrees and verdicts related to women’s social protection and their status in the family. The establishment of a Women’s Committee of the Republic in 1991 was the first step to increase women’s involvement in the resolution of social and cultural development issues and their participation in administration (Archive of Women’s Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan). In 1995, the president decreed that the second in command of every Mahalla committee (local governing body) was to be a woman, who would simultaneously act as the ex officio head of the Mahalla Women’s committees (Bohr, 1998). In 1997 the Women’s Committee developed and adopted the seven year plan called National Platform for Action, with the dual objectives of improving women’s status in Uzbekistan and enhancing their role in society (Ergasheva, 2002). According to the deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, the government allocated 5% of its GDP in 2000 to promote women’s social status (ADB and WB reports, 2000). It’s worth noting that the year 2000 was declared as a year of the Healthy Generation; consequently it can be presumed that allocated funds were directed largely to women’s reproductive health and well being. The Third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Uzbekistan to “Promote gender equality and empower women” is as follows: 1) to achieve gender equality in primary and general

---

17 The Mahalla committee’s composition, consisting of primarily, of retired, “respected” men in the community. It acts not only as the welfare agency but also as the local organ of citizens’ self-government. Women leaders of Mahalla ratio is 483/10133 in 2000 (Luong, 2004, Abramson, 1998, Sievers, 2002)
basic secondary and secondary special and vocational education by 2005, 2) improve gender balance in higher education by 2015. 3) Improve maternal health through reducing maternal mortality by one third by 2015 (UN and ADB 2004).

Nearly 70 legislative acts had been reviewed from the gender point of view. To overcome marginalization of women, a system of quotas had been introduced. Under article 224 of the Labor Code of Uzbekistan, it’s forbidden to refuse to hire pregnant women or to reduce their pay\(^\text{19}\). Article 228 of the same Labor Code prohibits the employment of pregnant women or mothers of children below the age of 14 years for night shifts, overtime and weekends and from taking business trips without their husband’s consent (Also see report on Women’s Status, 1999) to ensure women’s protection from precarious work, although on the ground such laws can be discriminatory against women in hiring practices based on their family status. The statistics department of Uzbekistan reports female literacy rate at 99.7\(^{\%}\),\(^\text{20}\) with approximately 60\(^{\%}\) of women enrolled in universities and colleges\(^\text{21}\) and over 40\(^{\%}\) in the public work force.

The growth of women’s NGO’s is one of the most positive achievements in terms of women’s political participation in Uzbekistan. Currently there are more than 200 registered NGOs’ in the country (Ergasheva, 2002). A May 2004 decree by the President of Uzbekistan to adopt “additional measures supporting activities of the Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan” laid further emphasis on women’s socio-political and economic participation. One of the key principles of the Women’s Committee is to “effectively coordinate their activities with women’s NGOs, in their efforts to improve

\(^{20}\) World Development Indicators, 2003
women’s role in modernization and the democratic renewal of the society, public and governmental building in Uzbekistan”

Notwithstanding these efforts, the government inevitably faces the challenge of deep-rooted patriarchy that has survived the strong russification process accompanying Soviet rule for over seventy years. Soviet welfare policy placed Uzbekistan in a contradictory position; on one hand the government advocates reducing the birthrate, while on the other, it provides child subsidies thereby encouraging childbearing (Report of Status of Women in Uzbekistan, RBEC/UNDP Luong, 2004). The collapse of the Soviet system resulted in a severe decrease in the number of women represented in various influential and authoritative positions in society, and there was a decline in the representation of women in parliament from 36% in 1985 to 7% in 2000 (Alimdjanova, 2003). Out of 250 seats, women occupied 23, constituting 9.2% of the Uzbek Parliament (Ergasheva, 2002); this was before the December 2004 elections where the president allocated 30% of Parliamentary seats to women. Only 18% of women are represented in senior management positions in the public sector (UNDP, 2002). There have been many debates and studies conducted on the impact of new state laws and codes, on women’s empowerment in post independence Uzbekistan as well as other former Soviet republics. Transition from Cyrillic to the Latin

23 script may have an adverse impact on literacy, particularly in the case of adult rural women, who after marriage neither have the time nor the resources to be re-taught. The setting up of an infrastructure to re-teach the adult

21 Decree of the President of Uzbekistan on “Additional Support of the activity of the Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan” from 25.05.2004 # 3434

23 June 1992 Uzbekistan introduced language reform from Cyrillic to Latin script
population will require considerable investments that the state probably cannot afford (Tokhtakhodjayeva, 1998).

It is evident that some legislation has actually impaired women empowerment efforts. The following statement by a noted World Bank anthropologist sheds more light upon this issue: “among the more fully elaborated and vigorously promulgated components of Uzbekistan’s new national ideology is an imagined pre-revolutionary past, in which the restriction of women to the private sphere supposedly enriched the lives of women and the entire nation” (Constantine, 2000). Given the aforementioned statement, it would also be difficult completely underestimate the legacy of Soviet “emancipation” of women.

iv. Revisiting traditional gender ideology in Uzbek society: Culture and Family and Role of Islam.

Challenges of economic transition and the revival of “Uzbek nationalism” after independence encouraged the restoration of “traditional” gender relations within Uzbek families. Rising educational costs and decreasing individual and family support services providing women with the basis to pursue their educational and professional careers, had negative implications on women’s status. Women’s poverty became linked to their unequal access to education, productive resources and control of assets, as well as unequal rights in the family and society. Evidently in Uzbekistan, women’s issues are related to their counterparts in other developing countries; however the priorities may be defined differently. For centuries, Central Asian women’s participation in the economic and social sphere has been directly linked to the demands of the traditional family and

---

24 Asian Development Bank term
25 www.globalsfundforwomen.org
community, as women remained the guardian of national traditions. They tend to relate themselves to their faith through compliance to these traditions and family responsibilities. The post Soviet view of the modern Uzbek woman reinforces the importance of a strong and healthy family, and the significance of a woman’s place in the household as a mother. Moreover, the prevalence of gender bias in the mainstream development policies of Uzbekistan increased women’s unpaid work, further exacerbating levels of oppression and exploitation (Barker, 2000). Therefore it is important to maintain a broad perspective when considering the possible impact of cultural traditions on the status of women and gender relations (Massell, 1974).

Culture and family. Culture has been defined only in its broadest terms, as the sum of basic values and beliefs, perceptions of history and politics, the foci of identification and loyalties, and the knowledge, perceptions and expectations shaped within a nation or group by specific historical experiences (Schneider and Bonjean, 1973). Culture is embedded in the family and its traditions. Uzbeks are more involved in social self-administration and with the collective acceptance of decisions on questions of social life; they exhibit great interest towards active social vocations (Chamkin, 1976). The traditional Uzbek family is characterized by complex extended families where the married couple resides with the groom’s family, and there is a patriarchal power structure based on age and gender. Patriarchy is maintained equally by men and women, and in particular through the hierarchical relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The possibility of seeking separate households is limited for most young

26 In the case of Uzbekistan, some caution needs to be observed when linking women’s subordination to Islam because of the general tendency to view Central Asian womanhood as downtrodden and oppressed by an Islamic patriarchy. This was certainly the line taken by the Soviet Union to legitimize its occupation of Central Asia and empowerment of women’s status in the society.
women due to the pervasive economic stagnation (Status of Women, 1999). Within Uzbek society, marriage endows a woman with status while divorce is viewed as a disgrace. The fear of being ostracized by the community drives women into early wedlock and compels them to tolerate humiliation and physical violence from their husbands. If a woman so much as complains about her husband, let alone asks for a divorce, the authorities will usually blame the woman (Abdullayev, 2002). Girls are viewed as “guests” in their own homes. The “qiz” (translation: girl/daughter) is a mutable entity – she is a temporary member of her natal family. She emerges into life when she marries, acquiring a distinctive and more permanent identity. In contrast, motherhood is the most unbreakable tie of all, and the role that enables a woman to acquire power and authority in her kin group (Doi, 2002).

Uzbeks are known for their adoration of children. According to the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics of Uzbekistan, more than 50% of all families have five or more children, and the burden of unending responsibilities on the domestic front, is directly related to women’s health and their economic and political status. Domestic and sexual violence further increase the suffering of women whose association with the “ichkari” (inner) family keeps their status low (Alimova, 2000). Most traditional women refrain from demanding their rights and equal treatment with men out of respect, fear and the taboo that exists in a patriarchal society; they maintain their existence in a “culture of silence” (Gulati, 1999). Women are also discouraged from rebelling against patriarchal customs of subordination, as they were schooled in a notion of honor according to which their subordination was rewarding to them (Hochschild, 2003).

---

27 Abdullaev Bobomurod (RCA No. 119, 10-May-02) Human Rights Watch
A survey conducted by one government institution in the late 1990s revealed that over 60% of female respondents considered domestic violence to be a “normal situation” (HRW, 2001). Rape within marriage is considered a family matter, not sexual misconduct, and is considered as the norm by both officials and community leaders. Therefore, women’s official legal status does not reflect their reality on the ground. National statistics show that women are the first ones to lose their jobs, especially the ones with many children.

Forced early marriages and the refusal to allow women to work outside the home also infringe upon the rights of women. Unfortunately, the rigidity of age-old mentality restricts women’s access to well paid jobs, and threatens the future investment of parents in their daughters’ higher education.

The report on the Status of Women in Uzbekistan (1999) shows that the role that culture and lack of legal literacy plays, in the continuing violation of the rights of women and children in Uzbekistan. To date, very few cases of discrimination have been brought before the court, so few precedents exist on the interpretation and effectiveness of laws against gender discrimination. One of the essential causes for that could also be that only a few women understand their legal rights and are restricted to a “culture of silence”. For this reason many Uzbek women in the most impoverished and disenfranchised layers of society become very obedient and submissive, in extreme cases resorting to suicide by self-oblation.

Role of Islam. According to Martha Olcott, “the consciousness of having an Islamic heritage was one of the elements that continued to define Central Asians

---

28 Women’s Resource Center, Survey 1995 Tashkent Uzbekistan
identities – even if a particular individual knew almost nothing about religion and observed none of its tenets” (Olcott, 1995). However, Islam has always been an inalienable part of Central Asian culture, even during the Soviet period. As a result of Soviet policies, religious beliefs and practices became more open and politicized (Lubin and Rubin, 1999). Since gaining independence Uzbekistan has defined itself culturally as an Islamic country; though exact contours of that identity remain unclear, the observance of religion was promoted as a means of independent national identity (Cooper, 2003). In this climate, the number of mosques has increased from 80 at independence to over 5000 by 1997 (Melvin, 2000). This renewed interest in religion led to the revival of certain customs associated with Islam that adversely affected women's status. Islamic feminists have argued that Islam itself is not oppressive to women, but that it has become so in many places as a result of the misinterpretation of the Holy Koran by men, as well as through the assimilation of pre-Islamic cultural traditions in Central Asia. The national parliament imposed restrictions on religious groups through the revision of a 1991 law on “freedom of conscience and religious organizations” in 1998, but the conservative attitude continues to prevail in gender issues. Islamic marriage is not considered official by the government but is accepted and respected by local communities; this acceptance made polygamy (officially illegal) and underage marriage (under 18) possible through bypassing state laws.

Throughout Islamic societies, including those in Central Asia, there are common ideas about family relationships and gender roles: men are women’s guardians, providers, and protectors; the woman’s primary role is motherhood, and the man’s honor depends upon controlling women’s sexuality (Luong, 2004; Fernea and Bezirgan, 1977;
Holy Koran, 4:34 says: ”Men are protectors and maintainers of women”). Uzbekistan’s intense religious and political polarization perhaps affects women the most: some are forced to conform to fundamentalist social mores; while others confront fundamentalism by advocating women’s rights (Rashid, 1994). Uzbek women, like women in other Central Asian societies remain essentially conservative because of Islamic and cultural traditions.

v. Economic status of women in the transition period

The World Bank’s 2002 “Living Standards Assessment” estimates that 27.5% of the Uzbek populace live below the poverty line and do not have the means to ensure a daily minimum intake of 2,100 calories. Approximately 74% of the officially employed are classified as underemployed or working in informal, temporary low wages jobs (World Bank, 2002), while unemployment in the countryside stood at 35% percent in 1994. Abject rural poverty pervades in the nation’s richest agricultural belts of the Ferghana valley and Samarkand (Rashid, 1994). Revival of traditional national culture, contemporary political culture and mainstream gender discourse carried forward from the Soviet era placed women at the bottom of economic ladder. Rapid population growth since the Soviet era and spiraling unemployment in the formal sector had a significant impact on women’s status in the work place. Many women are unable to market their skills in a competitive job market. Consequently, the poorly equipped female workforce desperately seeks employment in all available sectors and usually ends up replacing men in low skilled jobs. ADB research found that social assistance such as maternity leave is a major cost factor for companies where the majority of the employees are women. As wages are low, women often prefer taking paid leave (such as maternity leave) rather
than working (ADB and WB report, 2000). Between the late 1980s and 1997 the percentage of able-bodied women in Uzbekistan who were employed fell from a high of 48% to 35% and that figure includes women listed as holding positions who have taken three-year maternity leave (Kamp, 2004). Studies conducted so far suggest that women very rarely participate in local government bodies (Coundouel and Mickelwright 1999). The presence of women in higher levels of government stands at 13.7% (UN and ADB, 2004). Low levels of technology at home – particularly Uzbek ones, serve as a tremendous constraint in attracting women to the labor force (Lubin, 1984). Due to the decrease in number of day care facilities, the rate of enrollment in these pre-school programs fell 32% between 1991 and 1996 (Falkingham, 1999).

Government protection\textsuperscript{29} of women results in their inability to access certain jobs; additionally employers face restrictions as to the nature of labor that can be demanded of women\textsuperscript{30}. According to World Development indicators, women comprise 42% of the labor force and 63% of the unemployed (Status of Women, 1999). These figures must be seen in the context of the fact that employment statistics are often unreliable. Although 42% is reasonably high compared to international standards, most women are concentrated in the agriculture and production sector. Due to an increase in male rural-urban migration and external immigration\textsuperscript{31} for employment purposes, there has been an increase in the number of female headed households. UNDP research shows that the demand for female farm-labor has increased in the transition period due to the lack of mechanization and migration of male labor to the cities. Despite women’s extensive

\textsuperscript{29} Labor Code issued in 1995 does not permit discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, ethnic origin, language, social background, marital status or number of children.

\textsuperscript{30} Labor Code of Uzbekistan, 1995, Article 225

\textsuperscript{31} Net migration rate: -1.83 migrant(s)/1,000 populations (2003 est.) World Fact Book Uzbekistan
participation in agriculture, they continue to have less access than men to modern agricultural inputs (Shodiiev, 1998). High levels of female participation, combined with low levels of productivity and earnings, have been documented across all regions, especially among female headed farm households (Ulmasov, 1998). According to local experts, women comprise less than 3% of the approximately 22,000 skilled staff working on agricultural machinery – and close to 99% of the manual laborers on state farms (Egamberdiyev, 1974). Unpaid activities by women, at home and in the farm, tend to be very time consuming and are largely ignored. A UNDP survey of two villages revealed women working up to 12 hours a day engaged in production for the home and growing 30%-40% of their family’s total food intake.

(Figure 2.4) Distribution of Female Labor Force by Sector in Post Soviet Uzbekistan, 1999. Source: Women Status in Uzbekistan, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Female Labor Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade,</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communication</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and arts</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Home production includes food preparation, child care, cleaning, firewood collection, house construction, attending the sick and food collection.

\[32\]
Women pursuing a career mostly go into the fields of health, social welfare, and education in the public sector, areas that are the most vulnerable to the erosion of real wages (Mee, 2001). Unfortunately, national employment statistics often omit women working as day laborers and street vendors. When their children are faced with hunger, women all around Uzbekistan's conservative Ferghana Valley put up with humiliation, pitiful pay and possible rape to put a little food on the table (Sadykova, 2002). While no official statistics exist on the number of women who are engaged in “mardikorlik” (day-labor work), the sight of hundreds of women peddling their trade on the streets on a daily basis leads one to conclude that they form a substantial entity. Jobless, impoverished women are also being used as "mules" to transport drugs, sometimes within their bodies, and the number of such women in Central Asian prisons is increasing. Uzbekistan’s strategic location bordering all five Central Asian republics has made it a haven for transnational trafficking of women. Shuttle trade (small-scale informal private trade) along the border regions provides employment for older women, young men and all those who were dislocated as a result of the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. A labour intensive profession with low returns to labour, those who partake in it are subject to considerable harassment by border officials, custom inspectors and the police, and must frequently resort to bribes to move goods across borders.


http://www.turkiye.net/sota/sota.html
Scholars have brought to the fore an explicitly feminist analysis of the connection between patriarchy, capitalism and women’s oppression (Sen, 1984). Women’s status in Uzbekistan does not fall far from the scope of this analysis. Cyril Black suggests that a cultural or traditional heritage that is rapidly undermined by the process of modernization inevitably leads to a “fundamental uncertainty as regards to norms and values” (Black, 1972). Reformative development that aims to increase the role of women in society within a short time span is, to say the least, a challenging task. The societal promotion of gender sensitive practice and discourse is bound to clash with a deep rooted culture that has persevered in varying forms over the centuries.

Unfortunately, the highly propagandized indicators on the improvement of women’s status during the Soviet era were largely unreflective of the lived experiences of average women. The contemporary shortcoming of women’s participation in the socio-economic-political sphere is the result of the centralized Soviet command system that transformed forced veiling under an oppressive feudal regime to imposed emancipation and equality under an exploitative colonial regime. Consequently, the reaction of the post independence society to such “equality” was more hostile than favorable. Post-Soviet neofamilialism is highlighted not only by an anti communist attitude, but also an anti-modernist one. Women’s participation in the labor force, the undermining of the patriarchal power of the father in family affairs, and the reduction of household production activities are understood not only as the result of Soviet policy, but also as part of the inevitable process of modernization of the private sphere. Thus post Soviet

---

35 idealization of a strong traditional family
neofamilialism can be considered as a reaction to the obvious crisis in the Soviet pattern of modernization (Zhurzhenko, 2004).

The question remains as to whether independence has given a better position for women today? How has gender discourses changed? Postculturalist feminists contend that organizational practices construct the identities of men and women very differently, with women cast as marginalized actors who participate in only certain dimensions of organizational life (i.e., those associated with support services, nurturance, and human relations). And certain discourses prevail at the expense of others. That is, dominant interests are produced and sustained through specific discursive structures that minimize and marginalize other discourses (Ruud, 2000). The role of the state is significant enough to influence the shifts in gender roles and powers within these organizations. However, women’s role in making change for themselves is of great importance. In the case of Uzbekistan, patriarchy has been sustained not only by society, state and men, but also by the women themselves. Domesticity certainly brought heavy demands upon younger women, but it also offered gains in status that increased over time. It provided women an alternative means for survival in this system, by maximizing their opportunities and surviving the pitfalls of scheming mother-in-laws, infertility, infidelity, divorce and financial instability. But how is this attitude reflected within society and in the future of Uzbekistan? What is women’s attitude towards younger women who want to attain greater power and status through different means? Why is it so?

Western specialists claim than there is very little discussion of feminism and no feminist movement to speak of in Uzbekistan. Even those working for women’s NGOs prefer not to class themselves as “feminists” because the term is widely seen as a Western
concept, unsuitable for the world beyond the western realm. But it is also true that, given the choice, many women would rather stay at home, given that having a job often means working long hours in the cotton fields or performing some other strenuous menial task. There is also a belief among many women that they cannot alter their situations (Jones, 1999). They no longer believe in the existence of social enterprise, and consequently, do not believe that feminism will easily find its place as an expression of democratic transition in post-Soviet Central Asia (Tokhtakhodjayeva, 1996). Quoting a female Uzbek activist: “the quota was introduced because the Uzbek government signed an international convention\textsuperscript{36} on eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, but ... I am afraid it is just a formality... Most voters neither trust the women seeking election nor the parliament itself”. Widespread skepticism (among women themselves) regarding the capacity of women to successfully hold elected positions has been the result of economic difficulties and the revival of traditional views. But there should be a change in the attitude of younger women who have realized their potentials during this period of transition. Necessary preconditions for the emergence of a women’s movement include the need for truthful and objective information regarding women’s lived experiences, their perception of reality and how they would like it to be changed. This research should not be limited to the exceptional women who have stood out, but should also include average women, particularly the younger ones who are the future of the Uzbek nation, and rural female masses\textsuperscript{37} whose voices have been silenced for a long time.

\textsuperscript{36} Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (which was ratified without reservations in 1995)

\textsuperscript{37} Close to 70\% of population lives in rural areas, and women/men ratio is 51/49, men are likely to migrate for better opportunities to urban areas, but women stay and continue the life of rural Uzbekistan.
The following chapters will discuss the research methods employed to conduct field study in Ferghana Region of Uzbekistan to learn about women’s perception of female status on the ground and implications of this reality to the future of women and gender relations of the nascent Republic of Uzbekistan.
CHAPTER 3

Research Study. Methodology

Ethnographic field research conducted in the Ferghana Region of Uzbekistan in the fourteenth year of its independence is not the first of its kind. For many years this region has served as a pilot area for projects by the government as well as international agencies, results of which have later on been generalized or replicated on the national level and used in brief reports. However, national statistics and quantitative data have been questioned by international institutions as inadequate and not reflective of the reality on the ground. Rebirth of a new state opened new avenues for researchers to conduct surveys and ethnographic research studies on various issues including women’s issues and gender relations. But there are many challenges for a researcher to conduct multiple studies in the area; these include cultural and political sensitivity, lack of resources, skills and opportunities, especially in the area of gender issues. National newspaper and magazines articles promote patriarchal gender biases and division of gender roles in the public sphere. The media, owned and controlled in its entirety by the state, promotes programs that serve the “nationalization” ideology of the state where traditional beliefs are transformed into patriarchal gender discourse. Conducting this research in the most politically significant and religiously sensitive region of the country was both a challenge and an opportunity to learn about the reality of women’s lives. Through qualitative research methods, I offer explanations as to why enforced traditional roles for women jeopardize their rights and valuation as equal citizens and workers. I argued that barriers for women’s equal opportunities and participation in the society are more cultural rather than economic. Through the utilization of snowball sampling and a naturalist approach,
this is a qualitative analysis of women’s lived experiences and their perceptions of women’s status in post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

**Design. Qualitative research method, snowball sampling**

Prior to starting my field research I reviewed the work of writers and scholars on women’s status in Uzbekistan as part of my preliminary literature review. To gather information I used a triangulation of research techniques such as unstructured interviewing, participatory observation and document collection, a useful combination given time constraints and limited resources. In participatory observation, I participated as an *overt* researcher, i.e. my intentions were known to the women present in the room. In some cases, group interviewing method was used to make women comfortable to express their viewpoints. The nature of the research topic and interview questions required the permission of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Ohio University and was duly attained prior to going into the field.

The demand for empirically grounded and statistically verifiable statements and actions is becoming increasingly significant in all aspects of academia and professional life. Authors across various disciplines have offered many different methods, combination of methods, styles and techniques for quality research. In deciding the appropriate methodology for my research, I made use of a wealth of information from my professors, libraries, and social research guidebooks. After thorough consideration, I employed John and Lynn Lofland’s *naturalistic research* method to guide gathering, *focusing and analyzing* qualitative research data. Qualitative field research as many sociologists argue, differs from other research methods in that the researcher performs the task of selecting topics, decides what questions to ask, and builds interest during the
course of the research itself and in an inductive procedure that depends on the data in greater theory. This is in sharp contrast to many “theory driven” and “hypothesis-testing” methods of research in which the topics of observation and analysis, the questions about them, and the possible kinds of interest the findings might have are all carefully and clearly specified before one begins to gather data (Lofland, 1995; Bailey, 1996). The flexibility and independence to make additions and changes to my research design are crucial to attaining a thorough and honest analysis of the social reality of women. Utilizing qualitative field research enabled me to be actively engaged in the study as a researcher, observer and participant in the lives of the people I learnt about. John and Lynn Lofland support this approach in their point that the central reason for undertaking this ongoing observation of the lives of others is the fact that a great many aspects of social life can be seen, felt, and analytically articulated only in this manner. The epistemological foundation of field research is indeed the proposition that only through direct experience can one accurately know much about the social reality of participants (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). I view myself as indigenous to the women’s issues and the culture of the research participants. Having experienced similar thoughts and reactions to women’s realities, I felt as if I were a part of participants’ lives. Smith’s standpoint epistemology calls for starting research from women’s lives, from that lived experience that was eschewed by traditional social science. She notes: “by taking up a standpoint in our original and immediate knowledge of the world, sociologists can make their discipline’s socially organized properties first observable and then problematic”. By adopting this approach, research can effectively attain an “insight” into the everyday lives
of women and uncover their range of “subjective experiences” (Smith, 1999; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004).

**Characteristics of Sample Population**

Using snowball sampling I was projecting to conduct around 60 interviews; however time constraints limited the final count to 46. Criteria for participant selection were as follows: a) indigenous women living in the Ferghana region, b) women over the age of 18. The sample represents fairly educated, predominantly married, largely mature women with a median age of 36. More than half of the sample population does not hold a stable job outside the home. Demographically, half the sample population is urban while the other half comes from rural areas\(^{38}\). A little less than half of the sample population lives with extended families. i.e. the husband’s family, or shares a household compound. The average number of children for the sample is 4.

The women in the sample population represent different socio-economic backgrounds, ranging from housewives to active leaders in their communities. Among the interviewed female participants, 22% were between the ages of 18-25, 26% between the ages of 26-35 and 52% aged 36 and over. In total, there were more women working in education, health care and seasonal job sectors than any other category. Twenty percent are classified as women in higher positions in the public sector including health care, non profit and social work. Women in higher positions are categorized as leaders who have achieved superior status within socio-economic institutions. They are considered career women with higher education, better pay and social status in their communities.

---

\(^{38}\) Equal number of women from rural and urban areas was a total coincidence
(Table 3.1) Division of women leaders into groups by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of women Leaders by groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1 (18-25)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Int’l Project Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of women’s occupation in the job market by age illustrated an interesting picture with more variability and job security among women aged 36 and over. In fact, the majority of women classified in this research as leaders (in higher positions) live in urban areas. These achieved and ascribed positions are the combined effect of age and work experience that comes with time, as well as Soviet cultural influences on women that existed for several decades and shaped their expectations and opportunities. Also their positions have been influenced by changes in family roles where children grow older and mothers are able to go back to career development.

Little variability was observed in the occupations of women age 35 and younger, where the majority was engaged in teaching, care-giving and part-time positions. This could be explained as the effect of the child rearing period between the ages of 18-35 during which time, women tend to take maternity leaves and secondary jobs that allow them to nurture and look after young children, while bringing auxiliary income to the family, or entirely dedicating themselves to the family at home. Excluding the top 20% of occupations of interviewed women, 80% of women occupy secondary, low paid, and/or part time positions (see the sample characteristics in Table 2).
(Table 3.2) Population Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Group 1 (age 18-25)</th>
<th>% of group</th>
<th>Group 2 (age 26-35)</th>
<th>% of group</th>
<th>Group 3 (age 36+)</th>
<th>% of group</th>
<th>Total number/percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46 respondents / 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>39 married / 84.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 single / 8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2 divorced / 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>1 widowed / 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10 urban</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2 urban</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>11 urban</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>23 urban / 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0 rural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10 rural</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>13 rural</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>23 rural / 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>26 total / 56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>13 total / 28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7 total / 15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed (F/T)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>20 total / 43.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed (P/T)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10 total / 21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temp. Unem. 39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>13 total / 28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>3 total / 6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives w/family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20 total / 43.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children in average</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 either looking for job, seasonal workers or on maternity leave  
40 retired or doesn’t work due to disability
Method

Snowball sampling method was applied to identify women participants among the potential population for interviewing. Snowball sampling, as a non-probability sampling technique, also considered to be a form of “accidental sampling”. Snowball refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects (Babbie, 2002). Despite the possibility of deriving questionable representative samples, this method assists in selecting respondents who are more likely to provide honest assessments regarding their perception of women’s status in Uzbekistan, thereby creating a network of connections by women without the researcher’s own selection.

I collected data on a few participants of the target population, and then asked them to provide the information needed to locate other potential participants whom they know. One could argue that being native to the culture and language, and being of the same gender and ethnicity would have been sufficient to gain confidence and trust of potential female participants drawn from the population using a method of random selection to ensure unbiased and fair representation of the population. Although this method would be ideal to ensure unbiased selection, I will argue that the reactive, oriental Uzbek culture, with its blend of Islamic patriarchy and Soviet-era secrecy, is not yet ready to engage in sincere open discussions with a random researcher. This is not to mention that the population remains generally unfamiliar with social field research and practices. Approaching randomly selected women has the potential to create suspicion in the respondent’s mind who would be skeptical about conversing sincerely with an unfamiliar

---

“young female”\textsuperscript{42} researcher. Utilizing the snowball sampling method, I simply followed a network of contacts developed by the local women from one participant to another referring me to the next potential participant. Using their acquaintances as referrals, I was able to minimize the problem of not being taken seriously given my status as a young female inquisitive researcher.

Of course, being a woman does not make things necessarily easy. However, as Warren (1988) noted “invisibility as a woman” in some settings results in relations and access to locations that would have been denied for a man. Excluding one incident with two librarians whom I approached randomly to test an unbiased selection, I felt accepted by all other women I interviewed. This process of feeling accepted sometimes involved extensive “questioning” by women about my private life, my family and social background which is part of local women’s culture. Many sociologists including Bailey argue that familiarity with the setting or group provides a firm foundation upon which to build. “Those who are familiar with a setting may already have a rapport with members, understand the nuances of language and behavioral expectations, and have analytical insights into the working of the setting” (Bailey, 1996). Being native to the Ferghana region of Uzbekistan gives me an advantage as a beginner in the field of ethnographic research. Given its largely indigenous, rural and densely inhabited population as well as its strategic significance in the national arena, Ferghana makes a very interesting location for a research study about women.

\textsuperscript{42} It was discussed in the literature review that as an unmarried and childless female, one has a very low status in the family and in the workplace, therefore may not be taken serious by older more experienced women and men.
Research tools. i. Intensive Interview

Intensive interviewing, also known as “unstructured interviewing”, is a “guidance conversation”\textsuperscript{43} used in qualitative analysis. This method proved to be a strong methodological tool for gathering rich talk and stories of women’s lives in an attempt to paint the true reflection of what is the reality of women in Uzbekistan. In contrast to “structured interviewing” where the goal is to elicit choices between alternative answers to preformed questions on a topic or situation, the intensive interview seeks to discover the informant’s experience of a particular topic or situation (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Unstructured forms of interviewing served well to focus on particular gender topics and questions that women viewed as important or felt more informed about and wanted to talk more about. Sometimes, women’s responses didn’t necessarily follow the sequence of questions as constructed in my research, but it simply made it evident that those remarks were important for them to mention in the context of their feedback. I employed a “friendship model” (Oakley, 1981) to initiate relationships with participants as a friend rather than a subject and clearly articulated my interest and position in this study. I made every effort to be sensitive to each participant’s story and experience. I followed general interview question guides explaining the purpose and the nature of the study, assuring participants’ freedom to interrupt, ask questions and clarifications, stop or choose not to answer or participate in the study. The American Sociological Association’s Code of Ethics recommends: …sociologists should take culturally appropriate steps to secure informed consent… Special actions may be necessary where the individuals studied are

\textsuperscript{43} This term is used when researcher wants participants to speak freely in their own terms about a set of concerns s/he brings to interaction, plus whatever else they might introduce. (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 85)
illiterate, have very low status or are unfamiliar with social research (1989, p.3).

Following this recommendation, I read and obtained oral consent from each participant at the beginning of intensive interview (Appendix B). Oral consent, unlike written consent, produces less suspicion from women who are not familiar with such procedures and very cautious about signing papers. Digital recording and note-taking were essential instruments of my field research to transform my research findings into written documents. In the oral consent, I also informed and explained the importance of using these instruments and asked women’s permission to use it during the interview. Thanks to the comfort level with participants, the majority of women did not feel intimidated by the presence of a recorder. In the cases where women didn’t feel comfortable with the presence of a recorder, for instance librarians and journalists, I only took extensive notes and transcribed everything as soon as I had access to my laptop. It was however challenging to act as an interviewer, researcher and note-taker all at the same time when I had to dismiss the use of a recorder at the request of the participant. The recorder was of essential use to store full information with actual emotional voices that revitalized the process of the actual interview. Concurrently, I took short notes of the main points to catch words to ask, elaborate, or come back to at a later point.

While the fieldwork tradition in social science puts a premium on flexibility, it is simply a fact that some questions, research locations, topics or methods logically necessitate other questions, locations, topics or methods (Deutscher 1973; Zelditch 1962). I was sensitive to women’s reactions and their choice of the place and time they were available to participate. When necessary I rephrased questions and/or compromised the use of research instruments in order to maintain a natural environment for conversation.
For efficiency purposes, research question guides were organized in several parts starting with neutral and general questions to probing and leading questions that were divided into 3 sections as follows:

1) Women’s status at home, 2) career and choice, 3) voices of the past and present (see Appendix A). Most of the interviews were conducted in Uzbek; a few were conducted in Russian to allow women the flexibility to express themselves in the language that they felt most comfortable speaking. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and half.

ii. Group Interviews

In research practice, some authors have noted that group interviewing can supplement one-on-one interviews (Morgan and Spanish 1994; Greenbaum 1993). This form of interviewing is appropriate when the subject matter does not involve topics that may be particularly embarrassing to the respondent. It has an advantage of allowing people more time to reflect and to recall experiences; also something that one person mentions can spur memories and opinions in others. Moreover, by allowing respondents the time to sit back and listen to others, group interviewing allows respondents to rethink and amend any initial account that upon reflection, merits amplification, qualification, amendment or contradiction (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). As discussed before, Uzbek culture has retained its strong characteristic of collective thinking, especially in rural areas where collective work and collective decision making is an indispensable part of daily life and this type of sense of community has survived different regimes and systems. I found that some women felt more comfortable and outgoing when they had their female friends or colleagues present during the interview. It was especially evident
among rural women. Groups of rural women I interviewed felt comfortable elucidating their opinions among their circle of friends. This circle provided them a sense of support and security. One particular aspect that encouraged them to speak was that they all pertained to the same gender, and the same social and economic background. Such similarity and closeness, allowed them to even debate about questions pertaining to their perception of women’s status in the family and career. There were moments they forgot that the researcher was in the same room. These interviews gave very rich and interesting information, although sometimes it was hard to follow who spoke what because of the large number of participants; nonetheless the accounts of their personal life added a special touch to the outcome of the research.

iii. Participant Observation

Sociologists emphasize the mutuality of participant observation and intensive interviewing as the central techniques of naturalistic investigation in social science (Berg 1989; Bernard 1994; Emerson, ed., 1993). Participant observation, also known as “field observation”, “qualitative observation” and “direct observation” refers to the process through which the researcher establishes and sustains a multi-faceted and relatively long term relationship with human association in its national setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association. As many anthropological accounts make clear, doing participant observation in another culture involves a great deal of participant interviewing (Golde, ed., 1986; Lutz 1988) As W. Gordon West has noted, a review of sociological field reports suggest that the “bulk of participant observation data is probably gathered through informal interviews and supplemented by observation” (1980, p. 39). Observing women in their daily contacts with their family
members and with each other in social gatherings like monthly meetings, weddings, shopping and holiday events, complemented my understanding of their behavior, reaction to and perception of their own status. Observations of their approach to cope with daily struggles, resistance and compromises with certain cultural and societal gender discourses were a lot sharper than how they sometimes expressed themselves during interviews. Although I knew some of these women on a personal level or some other way, observing them through the prism of a researcher with particular questions in mind, has been an enriching experience to cultivate gender discourses from the perspective of a young indigenous female researcher. On a couple of occasions, I accepted the invitation of a colleague from my days in the university, to sit in her class during her health promotion seminars for women in rural areas. I also attended my mother’s peer gathering event where I felt I wouldn’t be perceived very seriously as a researcher, because they knew me first as a daughter of their close friend. My mother with whom I practiced my questions at the beginning of my research only had to mention the purpose of my visit to Ferghana, and women’s topic exploded and continued through the end of a festive gathering. Women were engaged in, and remain very passionate about, the situation of women in contemporary Uzbekistan.

iv. Document Collection

Document collection or the analysis of human artifacts, including memos and decrees, newspaper articles and other forms of written texts, provide another vital strategy for collecting data and to complete the triangulation of multiple methods used in this study (Hodder, 1994). To collect written data, I contacted local acquaintances and people I had worked with prior to going to graduate school. The Ferghana Regional
Library had very limited resources on women’s issues. Through the help of a number of journalist acquaintances, I was able to gain access to the Ferghana Regional Editorial office, containing archives of newspapers and journals. My initial delight at the sight of stacks of newspaper and journal articles written about women was soon followed by my great disappointment at not being able to make use of them extensively, as there had not been many scholarly articles written reflecting the true reality and concerns of women. A Women’s Committee that I visited in one of the urban Mahalla (neighborhood) Committee’s did not want to cooperate for confidential reasons. Consequently, the greatest source of information was the participants themselves. The director of a women’s NGO “Ishonch” in Ferghana City had collected extensive press information and legislative documents published on women’s issues and status in Uzbekistan since independence. Some participants referred me to acquaintances working in government and international project offices, where I collected copies of relevant laws and decrees and statistical data. Online resources, such as reports and scholarly articles published on the website of the World Bank, United Nations Development Program, Asian Development Bank, Women’s Resource Center of Uzbekistan and Non Governmental Organizations operating in Uzbekistan – proved an invaluable aid to my research.

v. Analysis of Data

The aim of data analysis is the discovery of patterns among the data, patterns that point to a theoretical understanding of social life. The key process in the analysis of qualitative research data is coding – classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data – coupled with some kind of a retrieval system (Babbie, 2002). Analysis of data collected through interviews, observation, and document collection has been undertaken in an
intensive and continuous process. Revisiting the literature I had read earlier to help me understand the emergent issues in my study of women’s issues in Uzbekistan (Bailey, 1996) and consulting with my professors and colleagues also proved valuable.

Interviews were conducted in Uzbek and in the process of transcription and translation into English. I made the utmost efforts to translate directly without putting my own opinion or interpretation. I transcribed all my notes and recorded interviews soon after completing the interview on the same day. It enabled me to recall many details about my conversation with the participant and enrich my notes with thoughts and impressions. Moving beyond recording and note taking, I used a simple word processing program for data processing. The “find” and “search” command, and typing code words alongside passages were helpful to search for key words and patterns. Employing John and Lynn Lofland's (1995) suggested theory of looking for frequencies, processes, causes and consequences to discover patterns were especially practical in data processing. Data analyses constructed the picture that made possible cross referencing with findings in the literature review and comparison with other research works conducted in the country.
CHAPTER 4

Discussion of Data. Women’s Perceptions

By and large women participants were very enthusiastic and forthcoming about discussing women’s issues during the research interviews. However, there were some inconsistencies: those interviewed in their homes and/or in the company of their close female friends were more comfortable and open to voice their opinion, talk about their biases and frankly discuss their understanding of their own environment. More than 80% of the respondents were comfortable discussing women’s issues and their experiences as lived, in contrast to about 20% of women who seemed somewhat formal or cautious about how to “correctly answer” the questions: these included librarians and journalists. This difference could be due to the fact that they didn’t know the researcher and this made them feel suspicious. Another factor could be location, because these interviews took place in their workplaces. The fact that many women were not used to being asked about their opinions or interviewed for social research, was obviously reflected in their reactions, which were a combination of awe, curiosity and some caution about the motives of the research study. During observations of small women’s groups in the trainings, and during small talk about socio-economic issues and families, one could feel the strong presence of opinionated and powerful voices. However, this has rarely been observed in the groups where male counterparts or authorities were present.

In terms of demographic difference, rural women were more concerned about rural unemployment, poverty and domestic violence. They didn’t appreciate the strong need for quality education, as much as how important it was that at least the man in the family had a job to feed his household. Many of them made an example of their
acquaintances and neighbors who work as “mardikor” and women engaged in small trade as a consequence of economic hardships in the rural areas.

Urban women shared similar concerns with rural women, although differences can be drawn with regards to age structure within these groups. Of utmost importance to urban women were equal educational and job opportunities, shifts in gender power and roles in the families, and compromise between career and family in post Soviet Uzbekistan. Many young women from urban towns embraced women’s economic issues with lots of criticism towards traditional customs that confine them to fundamentally traditional roles in the household. There was a clear division in urban and rural women’s views as regards to educating girls. However, both groups expressed that life had become so difficult that it was more important for the girl to be happily married than to be educated.

Interview questions were divided into three main sub-sections: a) women’s status in the family, b) career and choice, c) voices of the past and present.

**Women’s Status in the Family**

For questions relating to gender roles in the family, women unanimously responded that a married woman should take into account her in-laws and husband’s approval to hold a job outside the home, or even to go out, especially if she still lives with her extended family. Eighty seven percent of women aged 25 and above responded that a woman should let her older in-laws or her husband manage the salary that she brings home as her contribution to the family finances. It’s quite common for married women in rural areas to live with extended families. In the sample of interviewed women, 43% live

---

44 Temporary laborer who leaves home every morning to engage in any odd job to earn a living for a day. Usually mardikor refers to male worker, but it’s becoming a female job mostly in rural areas.
with their in-laws. On the other hand, some younger urban women who live separately from their in-laws responded that they manage their salary themselves, partly because their husbands work and don’t need their salary. Older women, especially those in urban areas, responded that they act as the family’s financial manager, tending to the routine needs of the household including food, clothing, utilities and associated social expenditure; only in the sphere of luxury consumption do women need to consult with their spouses and seek their permission. Results of a study conducted on family economics in Tashkent by the Expert Social Research Institute (SRI)\textsuperscript{45} funded by the Open Society Institute, found that in households where men and women both have higher education, women’s income contribution is less than 30%; this was the response of both men and women surveyed. For families where spouses don’t have higher education, women’s share of family income falls to between 12-15\textsuperscript{46}. The latter situation is especially prevalent in rural areas, although the reverse picture is observed in many families where the male head of the house is unemployed regardless of demographic characteristics.

All the participants responded that housework is time and energy consuming labor that is often referred as “\textit{tabelsiz ish}\textsuperscript{47}”. The unanimous response was that it cannot and should not be paid monetarily unless a woman is performing it as a job in someone else’s house. In fact, skills like cooking, keeping the house tidy, sewing and baking are essential parts of the dowry that is offered by the prospective bride to her suitor’s family. Although

\textsuperscript{45} Open Society Institute – SOROS Fund issued grant #102221TB1 to conduct research on theme “Changing women status in Uzbekistan in 1990s: causes and social consequences”. Research conducted in Tashkent Region using 15 face to face interviews. Based on the analysis of these interviews questionnaire were designed to conduct mass survey among randomly selected sample population of 1000.

\textsuperscript{46} Open Society Institute Fund – Uzbekistan “Issues of Gender Equality and Gender Stereotypes” Tashkent 2002, Social Research Institute “Expert” p.49

\textsuperscript{47} literal translation “work off the record” referred to unpaid house work in Uzbek language
not always the case, these skills help married women build respect and a positive relationship in their in-law’s family, ensure a secure marriage and avoid domestic abuse. Women both in urban and rural areas responded that they would like their husbands and extended families to give credit for and recognize their unpaid work, by supporting them emotionally. According to the *Expert* SRI survey, in response to the question as to whether there are any types of household chores that are considered exclusively to be in the female domain, 89% of women in contrast to 79% of men responded positively\(^{48}\).

A woman’s bargaining power in her family is related to her maturity, her family’s social status, her contribution to the family income, and most of all, motherhood. Respondents felt very strongly about the woman’s role in the family as a mother. They pointed out that they have an irreplaceable role in the society – a responsibility to create and mould the future generation of Uzbekistan. On the scales comparing motherhood and income contribution, all respondents seemed to view motherhood as a blessing and as a primary means of contributing to the family. This idea is nurtured in every girl growing up to be an adult, that she is valued and respected for her chastity, and for her future role as a mother and subordinate wife. This ideology of motherhood gives psychological bases of power and authority for Uzbek women that may seem oppressive in the eyes of Western feminists.

*In the nation, there’s a saying that man is a half saint and paradise for women lies under the feet of their husbands. That’s why wives should respect their husbands and be obedient to them. And for a man paradise lies under his mother’s feet. (Quoted from Mother-in-law, urban, age 50, SRI interview)*

The last part of the aforementioned quote is highly relevant in demonstrating why motherhood is greatly revered by women; women patiently tolerate the disproportionate burdens of marriage in the knowledge that motherhood will elevate them into a position of authority. Although it seems that such patriarchal gender relations will cause tension and marital rift, the divorce rate in Uzbekistan is fairly low. As regards to questions pertaining to bargaining power and choice for divorce, over 50% of women (majority of whom are over the age of 30) responded that it’s a taboo for a woman to divorce; on the contrary she should be patient, creative and try harder to fit into her husband’s family at any cost. “Oila va Jamiyat” (translation: “Family and Society”), one of the most widely circulated national woman’s magazine, published an article stating that “A woman who has failed to retain her first husband will never retain the second one, she’s an ill-bred”.

Today these stereotypes about divorced women being societal outcasts are changing, especially among younger women; however, other factors exist that account for why women would rather remain in their families than be “happily” divorced. According to responses in this research, these factors include economic hardships associated with a female headed household, denial of shelter in the paternal household, children’s need of a father, and the fear of failure in a second marriage. The pattern of responses seemed to imply more divorces taking place now than ten years ago. However, official statistics indicate that the divorce rate in the country has decreased from 2 divorces per 1,000 persons in 1991 to 1 divorce per 1,000 in 1998. This could be the result of a decrease in the rate of marriage, high monetary cost and bureaucratic red

---

49 Oila va Jamiyat, National Woman’s Magazine 2001, no. 2 January 16
50 Women Status in Uzbekistan, 1999
tape associated with divorce, and the revival of traditional customs where women once married should try hard to keep her family together at any cost. Women voiced their concern about increasing incidence of polygamy, but acceptance of such behavior was explained in many different ways.

(Table 4.3) What do you think about men having more than one wife or a family?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group %</th>
<th>Group %</th>
<th>Group %</th>
<th>Total of the group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Against Polygamy</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditionally yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above illustrates that all the interviewed women in the youngest group i.e. ages 18-25 expressed total disapproval of polygamy. The said they would not tolerate such abuse and would rather resort to divorce, notwithstanding cultural condemnation of divorced women. More than half the women aged 36 and above agreed with the younger women; however, they pointed out that it’s happening more often among their peers and it’s not easy to ban polygamy in practice given that both domestic culture and overall Islamic interpretation of laws permit multiple marriages for men. More inconsistent responses came from middle aged women (26-35) who were reluctant to take sides. Younger and urban women were outspoken on this issue by raising concerns and
condemnation of such acts from the opposite sex. Older women and many women from rural areas with more experience in marital life reluctantly responded that polygamy would be acceptable if a man is capable of treating both of his wives equally, which they also doubted. Today the cases of women living as second wives are on the rise. Acceptability of polygamy among the Uzbek population is justified with Islamic and chauvinistic reasoning, such as when a woman is disabled, seriously ill, cannot bear children, cannot fulfill her spousal duties, or does not treat her husband respectfully. Factors for justification of polygamy suggest that it’s always the wife’s fault. This is how many traditional families think. This type of attitude moulds women into subordinate and voiceless beings.

During the interview, a 29 year old single, educated woman expressed her disapproval of polygamy. Later that week, she sent an email to the researcher: “I did not feel comfortable answering you straight away, although I said I would not tolerate living in such family, today I still do...my father has a second family...it hurts deeply, but I cannot change anything. I also cannot refuse him as a father.” -quoted from the research

This message reveals the weakness of female self-confidence to make a decisive change in the situations where she feels her rights are abused. However in Uzbek culture, tolerating hardships resulting from an abusive marriage and forgiving the abuser is the sign of female strength and patience, and this quality is highly praised in the traditional society.

Child rearing issues show a clear pattern of gender inequality. The preference for a male child is predominant among potential mothers because first child if male allows women to establish their status in the new family. Such inclination stems from a
patriarchal system in which gender relations are rooted. The most popular responses for preferring a boy child includes his ability to provide old age security by looking after his parents, protecting the family honor and carrying the family name. On the other hand, a girl is seen as a drain on her family’s wealth and one who will eventually go and live with another family. Women often refer to their female child as a “guest” in her own home, because her real home is her husband’s place. Such an attitude during child-rearing creates little opportunity for girls to develop self-confidence and competitive qualities. These girls in turn will raise their children with patriarchal values.

In the SRI study, the majority of respondents, regardless of age and gender, highlighted patriarchal values in both men and women as more important than egalitarian and neutral values, when it came to having a successful marriage. For instance, about 50% of men and 45% of women, regardless of age and place of living, indicated a preference for spouses with patriarchal qualities, where men are the breadwinners and women are the caretakers.

**Career and Choice**

Views about career issues are more complicated and distorted. There was not even one respondent who believed that career should come before the family; even in extreme cases when the woman is exceptionally skilled and gifted, it’s in her interest to have a family. Such unanimous idealization of women’s traditional role could also be due to the fact that the majority of the respondents (39 out of 46) in this research are married women. Local media discourse has a great influence on how women feel about their career.

---

51 neither patriarchal nor egalitarian; this includes values such as sincerity, kindness and attentiveness for both men and women

52 SRI study in Tashkent Region, Uzbekistan p. 78
Many older and educated women, as well as some younger women responded that ideally, the woman should be able to find the balance between the two by being organized, creative and hard-working. On the other hand the following quote from a highly respected 52 year old urban female journalist stating that “...a woman should live sacrificing herself to her family, her children and her spouse, that’s the primary essence of coming to this world as a woman” discourages other women from engaging in a professional career. This sort of remark and the explicit expectation it highlights, leaves a very strong message to younger women embarking in careers in education and other fields. Among a variety of reasons for not choosing a professional career, over 70% of women responded that engaging in a career does not leave enough time to attend to household chores as well as looking after their children. Whether she wants it or not, engaging in a career outside the domestic realm often creates tension in the family. This research study also shows that 64% of women in general believe that if the husband earns enough, the wife does not have to work the outside the home. However, the responses of younger and educated women stood at half the aforementioned figure. In the SRI study on a similar question, more radical views were observed among unmarried men and women aged 16-25, where 80% believed that women should not hold outside jobs if their husbands bring home enough income; curiously, the response of older men and women to the same question stood at only 50%.

Such responses imply that younger men and

---

53 There are several TV programs on professionally achieved women’s lives and careers, such as the head of Republican women’s committee, University professors, prominent actresses and career women. However, the message of the program always said that these women have achieved such high positions, but have not forgotten about their roles in the families: there are parts that show how they do house chores and look after children. Does it imply that woman can’t be admired for her professional achievements unless she’s an exemplary mother and a wife? (notes from observations during field research in Ferghana)

women are taking more traditional views about gender roles. This might be due to the fact that the older generation formed during the Soviet era did not refer to “work” as solely an income generating exercise for the family. This was due to the goal centered ideology of the Soviet Union where the Communist regime, which controlled work in all job sectors, glorified the value of work and promoted the practice of engaging in a career as a source of self-realization. From interview responses and overall observations, it became clear that a woman’s motivation in holding a particular job is highly dependent on the level of encouragement she receives from her own family, especially role models such as her mother and older sister.

There are more cases today than ever before when younger women are “choosing” to go into professions that do not occupy the bulk of their time and efforts, that they would otherwise spend carrying out their domestic responsibilities. The overall response of the research participants indicated that there are several fields where women are best suited and most likely to make a career, while first and foremost maintaining their status as a good mother and wife. Some women referred to these feminized sectors as “white uniform” or female-friendly jobs, which include, but are not limited to, nursing, cooking, caretaking, working in the plants, factories and fields, teaching etc. These fields are the most marginalized and poorly compensated while being heavily female centered.

**Voices of the past and present**

As regards to the questions pertaining to the effect of changes in Uzbekistan after independence, 70% - 80% of women, mainly those in the older age groups, responded that there were more women engaged in full time work outside home in the past. This was due to the fact that work was encouraged in all spheres through government policies:
in the family, at school and in the fields. The expectation was that a woman should contribute equally to the society with her knowledge and talent, regardless of whether she worked as a field worker or as a professor. Today women are forced to leave their jobs due to the erosion of wages in the public sector, and the need to compromise between the opportunity costs of staying home and looking after children with pursuing a professional career. Many elderly and educated women resented this change in women’s status explaining it as a factor contributing to their reduced opportunities in the professional and social realm. According to the Poverty Assessment Project in Uzbekistan, women on average received wages that were 30% less than those of men in 2003\textsuperscript{55}, and this gap has increased ever since. On the other hand, women aged 18-25 in the research study – mostly educated, affluent and urban and comprising 30% of total sample population - believe that they see more good changes for women after independence in terms of choices for marriage, salary management, career and family balance. They especially stress the new possibilities to travel abroad to Europe and the U.S. Although this response cannot be generalized to young women in rural areas or those from less affluent families, it is important to note that the government of independent Uzbekistan has taken a great step forward in opening new avenues and opportunities for young people in the country as well as abroad. Chart 5 below illustrates the overall response of how women felt about the change in Uzbekistan.

\textsuperscript{55} Poverty Impact Assessment, “Supplementary Appendix of the Report and Recommendation to the President on the second Small and Medium Enterprise Project, ADB, December, 2000
Over 80% of women among those who said it has been a negative change for women since independence are women who started and established their career during or at the end of Soviet Uzbekistan i.e. women over 35. While defining themselves as Muslims and frequently voicing support for the current political administration, participants aged 35 and over, both rural and urban, educated and uneducated, consistently expressed concern that women are less motivated about their career and steadily losing ground to men in mainstream politics, sciences, and any other sector that would lead to a decent lifestyle, since the acquisition of independence. Cooper in her study on women’s status in Uzbekistan notes: women who grew up during the Soviet era, accustomed to access to education and the opportunity to work outside the home, made it plain that they saw such things as their right. Female university professors bitterly decried the loss of support for women in academia, where downsizing means firing the women
first. They complained about the lack of opportunity for their daughters and female students in general (Cooper, 2003). Women were especially concerned that due to economic changes, gender roles are shifting in such a way that more women are finding themselves unemployed and in the streets, trying to support their families through petty trade and temporary labor, because their husbands are unable to earn enough money or can’t find jobs. Out of 21.7% of women who were optimistic about changes as a result of independence, the majority (9 out of 10) are women aged 18-25. In responding to this question young women mainly referred to open borders to leave the country for jobs and education, president’s youth empowerment policies and more freedom to choose their husbands. As mentioned before, these young women represent urban, fairly educated women. To speak for women as a whole, many older women pointed out that the majority of young women from poor families, as well as those from rural areas, face tough realities of being a female. Nationalization policies are shaped to be sensitive to cultural, yet patriarchal views, where the male, both as a child and as a grown-up, is favored over the female in terms of practicing their rights for education, job opportunities and choices. While the proportion of women who responded that there hasn’t been any change in the status of women since independence could not be distinguished according to their age group, most were pre-dominantly rural women.

Leaders of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) stated that over the past ten years domestic violence, trafficking of women and children, and female unemployment have been rising at a steady rate, opening avenues for donor organizations to work with the government that has finally admitted the strong presence of trafficking.
According to a UNDP report there’s a gross underreporting of discrimination and violence against women, particularly when it occurs in the family. Culturally, women, especially in rural areas, are not used to taking their family matters to discuss outside the home; instead they seek help within the family where they are consoled and encouraged to be forgiving and patient. Interviewed women in leading positions, about 19% of total participants, (7/9 are women over the age 35) assumed that lack of encouragement in the family and at the teaching institutions shape young women’s mentality as passive, selfless and subordinate. Unmotivated and denied of chances to get equal and quality education, women hope for a successful and happy marriage where they will be engaged in idealized roles. In reality, given the changes that families are facing today, women are forced to take on unskilled, often underpaid, or illegal labor. Another reason for such subordinate female roles at home, highly stressed by rural and urban teacher respondents, is the lack of knowledge and practice of existing rights.

---

56 Women’s Status in Uzbekistan UNDP report for Uzbekistan 2003
The chart above illustrates the total number of responses broken down into several categories. 96% of the total respondents said that they knew that there are laws and regulations in place to protect women’s rights and interests. From the chart, 63% of women who said they knew some of the laws and decrees mentioned in the Constitution where it is stated that all men and women have equal rights under the new Constitution of Uzbekistan. They also mentioned governments’ attention to women’s status by declaring 1998 as the Year of the Family, 1999 as the Year of Women, and 2000 as the Year of the Healthy Generation. Twenty nine percent of the women who admitted they didn’t know anything. Only 8% of the respondents – all from urban areas, holding relatively high positions and over 35 years of age - discussed different laws and regulations issued since independence on women’s rights and protection. This pattern of

57 Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan 1992
responses reflects a relatively similar picture at the national level on awareness of legal rights58.

Women’s responses to questions pertaining to their awareness of rights are associated with their understanding of today’s “modern woman”. The pattern of responses indicated that all women assume that the number one quality of an ideal modern woman today is to be able to maintain peace and happiness in marriage. Creativity is another quality agreed upon by the majority of women as an attribute of the modern woman. They explained it as a need for a woman to find a balance in her multiple roles in the family as a mother, wife and kelin (translation: daughter-in-law) as well as in her profession if she has to work. Finding the balance between home and work in turn, implies that women are taking into account current economic conditions in the country, where budget cuts are widely applied in welfare and social services, making them low skilled full time workers. Although they did not mention that higher education can give higher returns, they expressed concerns for women being able to find well paid jobs. Last but not least, many women brought up the importance of motherhood as part of the indispensable quality of an ideal modern woman. In contrast, the majority of women attributed patriarchal qualities to a traditional woman characterized as uneducated, very religious, doesn’t know her basic rights, married early and extremely submissive. They did not want to classify a woman’s deliberate self-sacrifice and compromise of her career to become a mother as an additional negative facet of traditional patriarchal values. This attitude may suggest that women too hold culturally patriarchal values and do not see these values oppressive but honorable.

58 For more information please see Women in Uzbekistan, World Bank report on Uzbekistan, 2002
(Table 4.4) Can a woman become the president of Uzbekistan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 18-25</th>
<th>Group%</th>
<th>Age 26-35</th>
<th>% of the group</th>
<th>Age 36+</th>
<th>% of the group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10 people</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12 people</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24 people</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>46 people/100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women’s explanation of their responses to this question was an interesting one to explore. Women aged 26 and over had a larger variance in their response to the prospect of a female president. In general, women pointed out that the obstacles preventing women from ascending to the position of presidency are based largely on the following assumptions: 1) Family and the priority obligation of motherhood, 2) The nature of females: emotional, biological and psychological weaknesses, 3) Inability to compete with male counterparts. The aforementioned reasons subtly imply that women themselves have come to doubt the capacity of females to succeed in a high profile leadership position.

Surprisingly, the lone respondent whose answer deviated from the rest of her age group (18-25) was also the only one who had already established herself in a position of leadership, compared to her more optimistic peers who were still struggling to establish themselves in their career path. Having struggled to establish her presence in a male-dominated industry, she was highly skeptical about how realistic it was for a
woman to make it all the way to the top given current circumstances. The optimism of her more inexperienced peers as regards to the ability and strength of women, reflects the views of the younger urban generation, who believe that they have been given a chance for self-realization through formal education and the opportunity to access a career path. On the other hand, the SRI study showed interesting results to the question as to whether a female can handle the responsibilities of a president. Responses by men and women aged 16-25 were significantly lower compared to the responses of the older population (30% difference). This survey implies that the younger generation of Uzbekistan, which comprises more than half of the total population, is taking more traditional views of gender roles. Current research results in comparison with SRI survey of young women’s responses suggest that evident differences exist among younger women as regards to their views of gender roles with respect to education level and demographic location for instance, young urban women feel more optimistic about women’s abilities and opportunities.

Field observations as well as the increased rate of early marriages show that now there are more women marrying early than during the Soviet era. Education for girls has become economically more inaccessible and is consequently discouraged by their families. Discrimination due to age, gender and economic status, especially in male-dominant work environments, creates obstacles for women’s professional development. Rampant skepticism pervades among women themselves in their ability to manage certain job responsibilities. Older female respondents expressed pessimism as regards to how realistic it is for younger women to pursue a career, given family and peer pressure.

to marry early (due to increasing economic barriers and cultural restrictions), and the lack of empowerment to adequately equip women to pursue a career (lack of equal opportunities and incentives). Several older women pointed out that the young women are stronger and more independent to face the challenges of life; in a sense, they are less protected, and consequently, their parents and in-laws try to “protect” them:

I don’t let my 21 year old daughter go out by herself or with her friends, even on special occasions; she can only go with her older brother accompanying her. I was raised in a westernized family myself, but given contemporary circumstances, I don’t trust people outside. …I have to keep an eye on her until I give her away to her ho’jayin (translation: owner)⁶⁰, – quoted from an interview with an urban, temporarily unemployed mother of 5, age 48.

Referring to and calling husbands “ho’jayin” is culturally acceptable in Uzbek society, especially in rural areas and traditional families. Instead of using his actual name, women usually refer to their husbands as “ho’jaiyininim” (literal translation: my owner) in both the public and private sphere as it is considered culturally respectful and appropriate. This term has a strong implication as to how women perceive gender roles and power in marriage.

Young women themselves feel that they should listen to their parents because they know what’s best for their future. Peer pressure to marry at a certain age, the importance of maintaining happiness in the family, and the standards set for the “perfect wife” play decisive roles in young women’s decisions and choices.

---

⁶⁰ This term in marriage is used to refer to the husband as the owner of his wife, his family and the house.
Contemporary men, even educated young men, prefer to marry uneducated, homely girls younger than 20 years of age, as long as they have baking and sewing skills. They don’t want to marry educated women with a university degree because they think these women are more independent, more likely to be “spoiled” and difficult to deal with as a spouse. – quoted from an interview with urban female students at Ferghana State University.

Responses and findings in qualitative research indicate a changing trend in younger urban women’s perceptions about gender roles and responsibilities, and their reaction to these changes. Many of these young women during the interview hesitated to respond to the questions about career and family. There were some confusing responses about gender relations and women’s choices of life opportunities for self realization. Some of them expressed their desire to change prevailing attitudes in their families and communities. They stressed that men should acknowledge women’s potential to excel to the highest professional career, while concurrently repeating male stereotypes and patriarchal values regarding women's place in politics and public life. Their views reveal that their perceptions of women's situation do not necessarily correspond to the reality of their own lived experiences.

Many of the women have come to feel that the home is the ideal place for a woman, and this conception limits their potential to challenge their traditional roles. This attitude has been ingrained in women growing up in families with strong patriarchal values who passed these customs on to their children, even during the Soviet era. Changes after independence further strengthened these traditional gender roles, giving

---

61 referring to “having dated someone during her college years”
them more value. Those who break or challenge traditions are doomed to be outcasts. The government’s female friendly laws are placing women in a contradictory situation: on one hand they are promoting women’s traditional responsibilities as mothers and cultural agents; on the other hand, they are increasing women’s vulnerability to the economic challenges that the country is facing today.

**Summary**

Analysis of responses suggests that women perceive their roles and responsibilities as well as their socio-economic status to have been reevaluated after independence. They described both critical and constructive changes taking place in mainstream gender ideology. Respondents both directly and indirectly provided a wealth of information to the open ended questions. These include the point that a woman's family responsibility is the factor objectively obstructing her advancement in her profession. The women's replies also characterize the peculiarities of totalitarian society with its hierarchical structure, clan interests and prevalent injustice.

Women from the Soviet era perceive the effects of nationalization as a burden restricting their access to political and economic opportunities. Women in general feel that they have lost ground relative to men in terms of access to quality education and well paid employment opportunities. They feel that they are more dependent on the economic incentive and emotional security of having a family; therefore they are bound to the traditional gender roles within the family realm. Glorified traditional roles of the domesticated woman have been promoted to endow them the role through which they can
contribute most effectively to society – bringing up a “healthy, bright and talented young generation to build the prosperous future of Uzbekistan” ⁶².

Their vulnerability is increased due to stereotypical gender behavior, inadequate education and biased work environment in the job market and at home. Traditional gender ideologies are discouraging women from developing self-reliance and confidence to educate themselves and their daughters, in order to face economic challenges independently.

In supporting these ideologies, nationalization policies emphasized some elements of Islam while restricting others to create the conception of the ideal Uzbek womanhood. Besides ideal motherhood, respect for elders i.e. respect for old traditions and customs, acceptance of marital fate and subordination are attributed as ideal female characteristics, especially for unmarried women.

Women perceive their natural role to be mothers primarily due to the fact that their role models are quite often their own mothers. This results from the absence of strong female leaders in politics and the news media, as well as the disparaging portrayal of unmarried women who apparently have no status in society regardless of their professional accomplishments. Consequently the perception of reaching happiness through marriage and attaining position and power through having a family is very prevalent among women. Although they groom and encourage their daughters to be obedient, creative and patient wives, they also feel that these qualities will not prevent them from being abused, mistreated, and impoverished. The dilemma for most women is that they believe that a girl should get an education and a decent job; however, if her

⁶² from the speech of Islam Karimov – President of Uzbekistan
family, i.e. husband or in-law does not want her to work, she should be willing to compromise her career. This compromise makes both parents and their daughters reconsider pursuing formal education and a professional career. It reveals that many women seriously doubt their ability and willpower to succeed in a male dominant domain. Academic and professional achievement for the girl does not give her an important value in the traditional community if she doesn’t have a family of her own. It implies that girls are “guests” in their own homes; they don’t gain additional power or significance until they commit themselves to the revered role of mothers.

The mechanisms for suppressing women’s identity in the sphere of work are highly complex and almost all respondents acknowledge the existence of hidden discrimination. While a majority of women indicate that their professions suit their nature and that they feel they made a correct career choice, they equally feel that they were unable to realize their full potential because they were not sure that they would succeed. Some note that they primarily lacked a desire to go far in their chosen profession - a phenomenon linked not so much with their own self-esteem, but more with the inertia of the traditional culture.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion. Important Findings

Based on library research and qualitative data analysis, this study explored questions on women’s issues from the standpoint of women in Ferghana, their perception of traditional gender roles, impact of transitional changes on women’s choices and participation in the society during post Soviet Uzbekistan. Findings of this research were compared to data and findings of a similar study conducted by the Social Research Institute (SRI) in Tashkent, published in 2002. Contradictions of the research findings in this study with some of the data in the SRI research could be accounted for by the differences in the methodology, including qualitative vs. quantitative approaches, sample characteristics, and the study locations used in each study.

From the standpoint of sociologists, the nation strongly retains its specific features in culture, domestic life, traditions and habits. During seventy years of Soviet rule, the enforced women’s “emancipation” in Uzbekistan was a mere political affair to promote Sovietization and increase the productivity of the labor force, bypassing the need to promote egalitarian gender roles in rural societies. Findings suggest that although women were involved in the public sphere, their ideology as well as their perception of traditional roles in the family did not change. In fact, such an emancipation model caused most of the people, including women, to view Soviet efforts as involuntary enforcement and oppression of women, as it is stressed in post independence political rhetoric. The search for a pre-revolutionary national identity following independence has reinforced traditional views of gender roles and culture, narrowing down the scope of independent qualities women can have to those that maintain the family. Data analysis suggests that
despite education level and employment status, women of all ages and backgrounds share generally similar views of women’s essence and role in society, as well as female capabilities and opportunities to grow as an individual. Analysis suggests that women don’t seem to feel resistant to or oppressed by cultural norms through which they gain a position in the family and society, although it often appears otherwise in the western viewpoint. Instead, women blame the system that has stopped providing them social assistance to continue engaging in their traditional role. This kind of bitter feeling was especially strong among older women who have lived most of their lives during Soviet era. These women also felt that they had lost ground to men in certain job sectors as well as in the domestic sphere. Those women who have witnessed both Soviet and post Soviet life in Uzbekistan resented the changes in women’s status after independence. They feel more responsible to protect their daughters from possible challenges of life and encourage them to prepare and wait for successful marriage which supposedly should shield them from dealing with the difficulties of the current economic transition. Such an outcry also implied that changes for women have restricted their opportunities, promoting traditional gender ideology as part of the nationality reconstruction campaign. One could predict that economic difficulties have increased the social stigma of being a single woman. Traditionally cultural beliefs about a woman’s role in Uzbek society do not value her as an individual as much as she’s valued as a family woman. Changes in women’s economic status after independence have increased this socio-cultural stigma about women’s equal capabilities. Therefore coping with social and cultural norms requires girls and women to adapt to traditional gender roles and expectations. It is suggestive that
many women underestimate themselves as individuals, while they hold strongly the belief that their role is to maintain stable family relations.

Today, as in the past, when women do work outside the home, their choice of occupation is more often circumscribed by tradition and culture than by actual opportunities, prospects for economic gain, or government policy. As literature view and research results show, most working women are generally concentrated in low skilled work deemed as “female” sectors. Within particular professions, moreover, the place for women in Uzbekistan today is also more often determined by social attitudes than by salary or opportunity. The low female labor force participation rates in certain sectors result in part from strong cultural attitudes which are still upheld by the society and encouraged by current national policies as a whole. Although female representation in the job market had already been restricted to a limited number of higher positions during Soviet Union, it is more likely that with transitional changes taking place in Uzbekistan today, more women will be forced to concentrate on marginalized and unskilled labor work.

**Future Implications and Suggestions**

Data analyses imply that there has been a change in the views of younger urban women who have grown up in a more independent, interactive and less traditional family environment. Observations suggest that young educated and unmarried women are more daring and ambitious; they express more confidence in women’s abilities to compete for higher positions in career and education. At the same time, there was the presence of a subtle approval of patriarchal values i.e. they would choose to devote themselves to the family, compromising career and professional life as needed. This particular finding
represents a rather exclusive group of young women from fairly similar economic and educational backgrounds. Therefore it is also suggestive that young women from urban middle class families have some level of support and opportunities from their peers and families to pursue education and professions. However, the expectation to marry by a certain age, sometimes to certain families and engage in the most responsible role (such as motherhood) as inscribed by the traditional culture implicitly controls young women's choices for professions even before they dare to enter the job market. This expectation applies to most young women in Uzbekistan regardless of their demographic and educational background.

Traditionally the ideal woman’s qualities including demure attitude, acknowledgment of man’s superiority and self-sacrifice for the family, restrict young women’s self-realization and self-confidence outside of her predetermined role and responsibilities. This attitude, passed on and revived in the spirit of nationalization policies, results in the younger generations holding more patriarchal views of gender relations than their parents did during the Soviet era. This could be the reason why SRI research concluded that the younger population in general (age 16-25) today in Uzbekistan holds more traditional gender views than older population (age 26 and over).

Challenges and Limitations

As Brezhnev noted, changing attitudes among the indigenous nationalities will be the work of many years and decades (Lubin, 1984). Although the Soviet Regime attempted to create a gender equal society, the root causes of gender inequality have not been addressed in Uzbekistan. There are many challenges to address and one of the top ones is to change women’s own attitudes and disbelief in their capabilities; their
responses about how women should play a role in society reflect conservative attitudes towards the changing status of women in present day Uzbekistan. These women are purveying patriarchal values to their children where girls are ultimately treated as “guests” and don’t have an identity until they marry. The ambitions of young women to pursue a career are often opposed by their families and even their mothers. The Uzbek women who have achieved equal or higher political and socio-economic status than men are usually women with broken families and/or women who have gained political and economic weight during Soviet rule and continue their professional lives today. Traditional thinking of high achieving women is therefore tied to either being from a broken family or maturity (maturity might also fall out of this classification after Soviet generation women pass away in 20 or 30 years). In turn it becomes very difficult to build strong female role models for young women, unless the attitude toward women's professional achievement is changed.

Issues here also include no belief in independent activism by women in Uzbekistan and the fact that most Uzbek women have always been subject to social and familial structures of authority that discouraged their struggle for equal rights. Historical analyses of women's status in Uzbekistan suggest that women's empowerment efforts have always been imposed from the top down, a strategy which often fails in practice, even with best intentions to make social change in many parts of the world.

In general, education does empower young women to plan and pursue a career; however traditional gender roles, overvalued after independence and transitional changes are hindering their choices and opportunities for education and professions. Research findings suggest that opening career opportunities alone is not going to improve Uzbek
women’s status in traditional families unless there are changes in the mainstream attitudes toward women’s abilities and roles in society. Changing the mainstream attitude has always been the biggest challenge in many societies, but is accomplishable.

**Avenues for Change**

Historical analysis of women's status in Uzbekistan, particular cultural milieu and successful gender development practice around the world suggest that there should be a multi-sectoral and inclusive approach to address women's issues in Uzbekistan. Young women have the potential to be the best transmitters of change and become role models for the younger generation, given that they are motivated and still struggling to carve out their own identity. On the other hand, older women have a dominant position given their maturity, and the power they have gained as mothers and grandmothers being deeply respected by their society. This differing power structure suggests that in order to create a new avenue for change in the status of women as strong competitive individuals, there needs to be support for women by women in Uzbek society. Mobilizing a women’s movement is not a new idea in the Muslim world. The older generation of women who achieved position and power during Soviet Uzbekistan, if mobilized, could be the best activists to promote a women’s movement and support young women’s efforts of self-realization in professional life. This could be the last chance to mobilize older women brought up in a more egalitarian influence culture.

There needs to be a women’s movement led by women and strongly supported by the government and media. Change can come about when there are educated and empowered women capable of making shifts within their families and in the political rhetoric. A top down approach to empower women in Uzbekistan will not be effective,
unless there is a grassroots movement from within the communities supported by the state bodies, including men. This movement should be inclusive of women of all ages and demographic locations. Establishing a women's political party, women's clubs and organizations that support female workers' unions are essential in building a foundation for an egalitarian society in Uzbekistan.

Therefore, educating women as independent thinkers, supporting women’s movements and organizations are essential tasks for the state. The government needs to promote strong professional role models for women, discourage early marriage practices through changing political media rhetoric and programs on female roles in the household, and provide opportunities for women to engage in meaningful professional work while being a mother. Introducing scholarships and granting privileges to young women going into professional fields where female representation is scarce could help to close the gender inequality gap in the job market.

Uzbekistan has already undergone family planning reforms with significant success. Building on this reform, the state should enforce parent education that promotes equal parenting rights and responsibilities. This is a very important period of women's lives, as they enter motherhood, and they often face patriarchal challenges that compromise their own ideals and dreams while taking on full parenting responsibilities.

There's a need for collaboration of multiple stakeholders such as government and non profit organizations, international and domestic institutions, women and men to help give voice to women's issues in Uzbekistan. This collaboration will help to shape appropriate gender empowerment strategies and state policies.
Uzbekistan's record on women's issues does not stand alone given its historical, economic, and demographic characteristics that are similar to other Islamic countries as well as former Soviet Republics. Conducting cross country analysis and comparative research studies with countries such as Turkey, Iran and Russia could help to better approach gender issues in Uzbekistan. There's also significant need to conduct similar research study in different regions of Uzbekistan, for which this research was limited. There are many regional differences within a country, and conducting qualitative research studies using regional differences as a factor could help to better assess the pattern of women's issues and perceptions of women's status in Uzbekistan. It is important to stress that a country like Uzbekistan with a young population and with women in the majority should reassess its policies that foster traditional gender roles for women. In developing a strong society, the country needs both its men and women to contribute to its development and prosperity. This process should take place not through ascribing roles and conditions for each gender to follow, but through giving each gender all the opportunities for self-realization, helping them to develop their real potentials free from stereotypes and patriarchal restrictions.
Bibliography


Acar, Feride et al., eds. (2000) *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey.* Brill Leiden Boston Koln, V. 68


Akbarzadeh, Shahram *Remaking the Middle East – Islam, Culture and Nationalism: The Post Soviet Experience of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.* Ed. By Paul J White and William S. Logan

Alimdjanova, D. (2000) *Social Status of Women in Uzbekistan: Stereotypes created by the influence of different socio-economic changes in Central Asia.* Journal of Instituto Agronomico per L’Oltremare


Aminova R.K.(1985) *The October Revolution and Women’s Liberation in Uzbekistan.* Nauka Publisher, Central Department of Oriental Literature, Moscow


Bohr, Annette (1998) The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russian and Eurasia Programme. UZBEKISTAN Politics and Foreign Policy


Egamberdiyev (1974) *Vosproizvodstva trudoviy resursov selskoy mestnosti Uzbekistanai osnovniye puti uluchsheniya ikh ispolzovaniya*, Fan Matbuoti Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Emerson, R. et al., eds. (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago


Fernea E. and Bezirgan B. eds. (1977) *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*. Austin: University of Texas Press


Kappaler, Andreas et al. (1994) Muslim Communities Reemerge – Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia Duke University Press, Durham and London


McDonald, Mark (2004) Young women in Rural Uzbekistan seek escape by self-immolation. Knight Ridder Newspaper, Samarkand Posted on Tue, Apr. 27


Nalivkin, V. P. et al. (1924) Ocherk bita zhensheni osedlogo tuzemnago naseleniya Fergani (Essay on the daily life of the women of the settled indigenous population of Ferghana. Kazan: Tipografia Imperatorskovo Universiteta

National Plan of Action for the Improvement of the Status of Women (2001)  


Parpart J. and Staudt K. (1990) *Women and the State in Africa.* Boulder Colo: Lunne Reinner Publisher


Poverty Impact Assessment (2000) *Supplementary Appendix of the Report and Recommendation to the President on the second Small and Medium Enterprise Project* ADB, December


Tokhtakhodjayeva, M. (1996) To Be Or Not To Be: The Women's Movement. Appears In The Daughters of Amazons-Voices from Central Asia Chapter 7, May


Database: Academic Search Premier

The Times of Central Asia published 27-11-2004 www.times.kg


http://www.if.ufrgs.br/iupap/uzbekistan-poster.html

http://www.if.ufrgs.br/iupap/uzbekistan-poster.html
APPENDIX A

Neutral Face sheet questions:

About yourself: How old are you? (18-25) ___ (26-35) ___ 36 and over____

Marital status: single__ married__ divorced__ widowed___

Who do you live with?

In-laws__ husband in separate household__ with immediate family__ other__

What level of educational institution did you complete?

Secondary education__ College/Vocational school__ University__ Other__

What sector of the economy do you work now?

Health care__ Education__ Agriculture__ Government__ Trade__ Other___

How many years of work experience do you have?

0-5 years, 5<10 years, 10<15 years, 15<20 years, 20<30 years, never worked__

Probing question: (profession)

What’s your occupation now? How many years did you work?

How did you choose your profession? What was the motivation behind your choice?

Describe the notion of “work”? What do you think about housework?

If you had a chance to change your profession, who do you want to be today, why? How do you manage your income/salary?

Probing questions: (women’s status in the home)

What are “modern woman” and “traditional woman” in your understanding? How do you view Uzbek women in general? What do you think about men having more than one family at the same time? How do you feel, why women in most cases don’t want to divorce? Describe what makes a woman a “happy” “successful” woman in the society

What should be changed in men’s and women’s role, in the family, in the system, marriage, traditions in order for a woman to reach her “happy” life?

Probing questions: (career and choice)
What do you think, should women ask permission of their in-laws and families to work outside home? Who should she account for?
What do you think should be changed for women in the workplace/home?
For a woman to be successful in her career what should be in place at home, and at work place?
Do you think a woman can have a successful career and be a good mother at the same time? If not, which one she should choose?

Probing questions: (voices of the past and present)
What is different about younger women now comparing to women during the former Soviet time? What has changed for women of Uzbekistan/your society/family after 13 years of independence? - - Did it get better or worse for women?
Should the government provide child care for working women?
How do you feel about the role of Women's Committees in your area?
Do you know what laws, codes and regulations exist in Uzbekistan to protect women?
Do you think a woman can become the president of Uzbekistan?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!
APPENDIX B

ORAL CONSENT FORM (used in UZBEK LANGUAGE)

Dear Participant,

Mohira Kurbanova is a Master’s Degree candidate at Ohio University, conducting qualitative research study on gender role ideology and its impact on women’s employment and political participation in Uzbekistan after independence. The purpose of the study is to find out how significantly gender role ideologies impact on today’s image of women in Uzbekistan, and what should be done in the future to empower women’s role in the society.

We believe all women should have a voice, but research timeline and resources are limited, therefore, we will be sampling participants from different sectors of the economy.

You have to be over 18 years of age to participate in this study.

If you are selected and agree to participate in this study, you will be asked several open ended non-technical questions. These questions do not pose any risk or discomfort, and you have the right to reject or discontinue the process of interview at any time at your discretion. All your information will be completely confidential. Research results will be used in the Master’s Thesis of Mohira Kurbanova at Ohio University.

With your permission, the researcher will take notes and use audio-tapes to record the conversation during the interview. The Audiotape is important to record your answers correctly, for after the interview, the researcher will use it to compare her notes so that your information is correctly interpreted. The duration of the interview will range from 30 min to 1 hour. There are no moral or financial benefits offered.

If you have any questions please ask the researcher before or at the end of the interview.

Or contact at:
Mohira Kurbanova
Master’s Student at Ohio University
Mohira22@yahoo.com

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION!