“Nothing of the Old”: The Narratives of Soviet Women’s Emancipation in Mailin’s *The Communist Raushan*

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Introduction:

"Is there anyone more miserable than a woman in this life?"[1] asks the protagonist of Mailin's novel *The Communist Raushan*, in an episode in which she travels to a prosperous neighboring village and sees the immense difference in the socioeconomic life of this village under Soviet rule. Accustomed to the monotonous life in an ordinary Kazakh village, she experiences the encounter with progress as a transformative experience. The woman who had never been outside her village naturally discerns those striking differences and questions her social status. She can build a new legacy for herself under the aegis of the Soviet regime. In this moment, she is between two worlds, one in which she may form a new identity and one in which she has shaped her current life. The heroine, who loses touch with her old time, is waiting to form new connections in the progressive socialist society. Mailin's work is revolutionary in many senses, for the author shows an early interest in the confusion inherent in converting to socialism. The novel thus provides a snapshot of how the socialist reality established itself in the 1920s.

This project thus explores women as a part of the Soviet project dedicated to creating new identities. I aim to research the portrayals of the heroine Raushan's household, people, and time in Mailin's *The Communist Raushan* to answer it. As I shall argue, Raushan's personal growth from housewife to state representative followed the agenda of the Soviet emancipation program. The character's dynamicity, however, did not just reflect the positive political pretext; it also served as a remedy against

[1] "Дүниеде әйелден сорлы бар дейсің бе?" Beimbet Mailin, *Raushan Kommunist* (Almaty: Mektep, 1980), 9.

estrangement from her contemporaries. Her character's change is of double significance, both a positive change and a coping mechanism.

Methodology:

I wanted to research the socio-political changes that affected women in Soviet Kazakhstan. I realized that the experience of womanhood in the twentieth century can be observed through the literature of that period. It is essential to analyze this because most of the research is concentrated on other Soviet literature, such as Uzbek. The repertoire of Beimbet Mailin became the focus of my research because of the exceptional display of Socialist Realism prose through ordinary life events that overtly reflected communist values. Among many stories, screenplays, and a couple of novels he authored, I have chosen a particular novel as a primary source of analysis for this research. The work titled *The Communist Raushan* was written in 1923, and it narrates the story of the heroine, Raushan, who faces hardships on her way to becoming an accurate model of a Soviet woman. Nauryzbayev, a Soviet-era scholar of Kazakh literature, states that she was the first woman to be represented as a true communist in early 20th-century Soviet Kazakh literature. [2] It is crucial to research the work, for it significantly predates the rise of Socialist realist prose fiction. A close reading of the novel will help clarify one of the research questions of the work: How did a writer of that time, Mailin, portray the benefits and challenges of emancipation for Kazakh women? It is essential to understand that the novel does not directly answer these questions but rather represents these issues in

[2] Bisenghali Nauryzbayev, *Қазақ Прозасындағы Б.Майлин Дәстүрі* (Almaty: Ghylym, 1979), 133.

literary texts. The first part of the project should discuss the socio-historical background, namely the Soviet policies that built social groups loyal to them. I mainly focus on the initiatives employed among the Uzbeks to differentiate them from the Kazakhs. Then, I centered my project around the literary evidence as another tool that accentuated the campaign's uniqueness. I will look into the discussion of male prejudice and conflicts between the women in the novel.

Socio-historical background of the liberation movement

An active and ubiquitous program of Sovietization marked the post-1917 period. The empire that had just started building its doctrines suddenly realized that it was a conglomerate of distinct nationals, differences of which challenged the state administration. What strategies did the Soviet Government turn to in response to this challenge? How did they go about building a society that would be loyal to the Soviet state? The key idea was about focusing not on whole nations but rather delineating a sub-element, "minorities" of society. The state identified women as an oppressed group, hence marking them as a constituency potentially loyal to Soviet power. Once women's problems had become central to the state's agenda, they could serve the nation's needs in the long run. To quote Claire Roosien, the state's outbursts of empathy "were ultimately oriented, not toward promoting diversity for its own sake, but toward integrating categories of difference in a universal Soviet public."[3] Subsequently, an ongoing

[3] Claire Roosien, "Introduction," in *Socialism Mediated: The Soviet Mass Public in Uzbekistan, 1928-37* (Chicago: ProQuest, 2019), 29.

recruitment of a group whose interest in progress coincided with the administration's. Observing the attempts at liberating women among neighboring republics, the state decided the targeted addressee on whom the regime's profound affinity towards emancipation would be promoted. As a result, women were at the onset of experiencing a massive cultural revolution that would redefine their role in society.

One of the social actors responsible for mediating emancipation among Uzbek women was the Uzbek intelligentsia, including the Jadids, who were referred to as Muslim modernists by scholars in the Uzbek SSR and elsewhere in the world. The Jadids were Muslim reformists whose political activity predated the 1917 revolution. In *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, the book narrating the nation-building of Soviet Uzbekistan, Adeeb Khalid refers to Jadid political campaigns that accentuated female participation in the public sphere. The reformists prioritized women's rights, demonstrating paramount progress in educating the masses from the beginning of their political careers.[4] Their presence as mediators thus speaks to how the Soviets, at this point, are turning towards preexisting native intelligentsia as allies. This information is essential when referring to Mailin, for many of his peers were Jadids; he was educated by like-minded Jadidists, who inspired him to produce a Jadid-style Kazakh prose fiction.

Although the emancipation campaigns in Soviet Central Asia took on relatively similar forms, a distinct Uzbek ASSR initiative differentiated Uzbek women from states like the Kazakh and Turkmen ASSRs. This unveiling program gained prominence in the

[4] Adeeb Khalid, "A Revolution of the Mind," in *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 198.

1930s and attempted to engage more women in social life by abolishing "female seclusion and the veil." [5] The Bolsheviks (as well as reformist groups like Jadids) believed that freeing women from problematic social obligations like wearing a veil would pave the way toward a liberated society. [6] Far better than other Soviet initiatives, one has to admit that those emancipation campaigns were the only hope for the state to diffuse its power in the Eastern parts. [7] There is, however, a reason why the unveiling agenda was not feasible for women in the Kazakh steppe.

Compared with the more secular Kazakh ASSR, Uzbek women possessed a visible (and viable) physical attribute - the veil - that could be easily altered, facilitating the liberation project and acting as the movement's primary catalyst. Kazakh women, who did not see veiling as central to their identity, had to approach emancipation through less religiously attached means. Thus, the Bolsheviks had to reconsider their agenda when spreading emancipation among Kazakh women. Could it be promoted through other means, like altering familial and marital traditions and eradicating illiteracy? What were the alternatives?

In the 1930s, the emancipation program reached its zenith, with various educational institutions and incentives to liberate women from the chains of patriarchal society. One initiative was the installation of so-called red yurts in the steppe, which were built to educate women about "the development of women's equality, good hygiene and

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[5] Adrienne Edgar, "Emancipation of the Unveiled," in *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 221.

[6] Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 81.

[7] See Douglas Northrop's *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* for more information on water and land reforms and anti-religious campaigns.

mechanised labour." [8] Such places set new standards for proper behavior and proper "culturedness among locals. In her book Women in the Soviet East, which describes the liberation agenda in the east frontiers, Fannina Halle makes a great example out of the organization of Red yurts. She points out how transformable yurts were both consulting rooms and party clubs for women.[9] Nomadic women sought medical advice, educated themselves on women's rights, and some became representatives of Soviet power too. The placement of mobile Soviet propaganda spots in Kazakh steppes can be understood as a major achievement for the state. To quote Halle, "In 1924 there were some 5,000 native women organized in Central Asia to take part in the work of the Women's Sections, and a year later the number was 15,000; these figures have a far greater significance here than elsewhere, since it was a question of nomadic women, widely scattered and difficult to reach." [10] Red teahouses served the same pedagogical function throughout south Central Asia. These teahouses were designed to have "the right kind of people " inside the building, reinforcing the political propaganda among the population of Soviet Uzbekistan.[11] Thus, one must observe the massive expansion of Soviet agitation throughout the eastern territories. All women's clubs, red yurts, and teahouses – among many other unlisted initiatives - promoted education and potential liberation.

Because there were conflicting attitudes towards accepting the Soviet authority, the liberation ideas were promoted relatively slowly among Kazakh women; therefore, the state had to conduct an additional investigation into the nomadic nations' gender

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[8] Rebekah Ramsay, "Nomadic Hearths of Soviet Culture: 'Women's Red Yurt' Campaigns in Kazakhstan, 1925-1935," *Europe-Asia studies* 73, no.10 (2021): 1952.

[9] Fannina Halle, *Women in the Soviet East* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg LTD, 1938), 147.

[10] Ibid, 153.

[11] Claire Roosien, "'Not Just Tea Drinking': The Red Teahouse and the Soviet State Public in Interwar Uzbekistan," *Kritika* 22, no.2 (2021): 488.

practices. Adrienne Edgar, in her research on Turkmen women's identity in the twentieth century, mentions that Kazakh women, along with Turkmen women, had the privilege of "considerable freedom of movement and were allowed to become acquainted with their future husbands before marriage, unlike the secluded women of neighboring settled regions." [12] This brings us back to how the Soviet Kazakh writers, like Mailin, presented the differences in their works.

The focal point of my research is the novel written by a Kazakh author, Beimbet Mailin. He was born in 1894 to an economically disadvantaged family that worked for a bay (wealthy landowner) household. Having lost his parents at a young age, he was brought up by his grandmother and received education from several mollas in the village. He would study in several institutions, later starting a career as the chief editor of prominent Kazakh journals like *Sadaq, Auyl, Qazaq,* and *Aiqap*. In his works, he promoted the idea of renouncing the old way of life. Therefore, Mailin's answer to the emancipation question is deeply connected to his biography. As a true Soviet patriot, he promoted Soviet values through education. Hix text can be interpreted both as a didactic material directed at converting Kazakhs to the invention of Soviet modernity and also as a personal example of a native intelligentsia member attempting to solve and communicate what this modernity is.

Claire Roosien's scholarship on the formation of the early Soviet state's public sphere casts light on the ways social actors like Mailin mediated socialist values through their works. She discusses how those mediators employed the state's agenda in their own way, which, while not implying blind obedience, still contributed to disseminating

[12] Edgar, 206.

socialist ideas to the masses. The artists were given instructions on how to promote socialism through their art. Although socialist realism might, as Roosien commented, "be seen as no more than a tool for conveying state messages," [13] the artist's genius exercised its authentic interpretive labor. Mailin could have effortlessly restricted himself to changing women's clothing or accentuating their political participation. However, he demonstrated that such social activities are not sufficient. He believed that a truly emancipated Soviet woman had to receive an education to be fully enlightened. In my thesis, I have built several archetypes of women to answer the author's question on who deserves this enlightenment and how it is explained. As I should argue, the types of women who earned the state's trust are young women, the stories of whom inspired the liberation of other oppressed heroines.

I have decided to analyze the representation of emancipated Kazakh women in Mailin's works. When he wrote *The Communist Raushan*, he made the characters aware of state policy changes that would knit both men and women into the fabric of struggle with the new time. Undoubtedly, emancipation created a dichotomy of thoughts in the village. This section introduces Marlin's representation of the backward rural elite and their misogynistic attitudes toward emancipation. For example, most of the male characters in the story react negatively to the gender equality narrative. Responding to the state representative's interest in inviting village women into the communal meetings, they would state, "What would they do when gathering them [women] together? Tell me, is there anything you will not see when the end times are coming? The idea of emancipation

[13] Roosien, 30.

is hyperbolized as the end of civilization, indicating the symbolic death of the old era.[14] Some skeptically comment, “Is not what they are doing now a nuisance? There is nothing that belongs to the old day.” [15] The established representatives disapprove of women's involvement in the village authority's affairs. The excerpt is shaped into an allegory of anti-Soviet backward thinkers who would reject any change in favor of preserving the indigenous patriarchy. Mailin includes their comments of ardent dissatisfaction with new policies to express a dichotomous attitude towards the time. On the one hand, there is a nostalgia for the idealized old days when women’s participation in public life was not accepted. Old men within the novel, including mollas, biis (political representatives), and elders, would refer to the proverbs that purposefully show the lower status of women: “A man looks at the land, a woman looks at a man”, “The country led by a woman would face disaster.” [16]

Although such passages highlight the society’s resistance to institutional changes, Mailin condemns the normality of such stagnation. The old should not be linked to the good in any way. Conversely, it should be understood as a sign of backwardness. It was a technique used by Soviet Kazakh writers for whom labeling “their society as “backward” was a way to promote the ideology of Soviet modernization. [17] The new ideology

[14] It is also important to emphasize that these ‘backward’ villagers use a religious term ‘ақыр заман,’ in describing the advent of Soviet power.

[15] “…тәйірі, осы күнгі іс пе, құр әурешілік. Бұрынғының бірі де жоқ.” Ibid, 12.

[16] “Қатын ерге қарайды, ер жерге қарайды”, “Қатын бастаған ел қараң қалады” Ibid, 47.

[17] Diana Kudaibergenova, “Self-Orientalization and Rewriting of the Narrative,” in *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017),* 22.

condemned the old, filthy, and misogynistic state of being, and women trespassing on male-dominant spaces was thus a first step in liberation from the past.

Readers notice how the author gradually imbues the criticizing remarks of the male characters with more acceptance. Notwithstanding the majority denouncing the Soviet progress, the sense of a new reality actively fermented in other's minds. When the protagonist Raushan arrives at the meeting with her husband, an old man addresses him by saying "Did you bring a *kelin* (daughter-in-law) to the meeting?...No matter what you do, the Soviet state is providing women with amenities. What would one do anyway, I guess they would benefit from it!", [18] "The era is theirs, agreed!" [19] The characters abide by the state's values and see the differences as benefits to mankind. Unstated but lingering is the sense that men cannot do anything against such changes; they would sacrifice their daughters, wives, and customs to turn them into a Soviet dream eventually.

Northrop also discusses the story of a peasant family in Uzbek ASSR who, following the Soviet order to unveil, lost the villagers' trust. It is a real-life example of how state initiatives frequently conflict with local traditions. This very attempt, therefore, parallels Raushan's story, demonstrating that liberation campaigns came with unprecedented social risks. [20]

[18] "Е, келінді жиылысқа әкелдің бе?...Не қылса да кеңес үкіметі әйелдерді жарылқап-ақ жатыр..Не қыласың, бір теңселіп қалатын шығар!" Ibid, 11.

[19] "Заман осылардікі, болғаны-ақ, мақұл!" Ibid, .

[20] Northrop, 94.

Literary Themes and Symbols

The Discussion of Male Prejudice

This section explores the interaction of women with others in the village. After focusing on the descriptions of women in isolation, I wanted to focus mainly on how they build relationships with the opposite sex. The very start of these relations is in the village. The protagonist's surroundings have many male figures: husbands, mullas, biis, etc. Mailin presents them relatively narrowly, without including positive figures among them. Scarcely a mention can be found of those men stepping out of the patriarchal gender norms. Most of the male characters are reluctant to educate their wives and daughters; they continue the cycle of oppression by trapping them inside the daily routine or turmys. Likewise, Mailin accentuates the high threshold for escaping turmys in the novel's beginning, where Raushan notices the absence of young women in the meeting organized by the local administration. Commenting that one member intentionally did not bring his daughter to the meeting, she states:

> He has left the elected daughter at home, instead bragging about bringing his old wife to the meeting. [21]

This excerpt makes antagonists of men who do not allow the engagement of young women in public life. We are told that a woman depends on her husband's authority; she remains subordinate to him, being perceived as a possession. The conventional idea is that confining a woman to the household may ensure that safety does

[21] "[Ермақ] Осы жиылысқа сайланған қызын үйінде қалдырып, орнына кемпірін әкелгеніне мақтанып отыр…" Ibid, 16.

not function as intended; conversely, limited mobility is the central danger to her progress. The text shows the opposite example to what Clark referred to as "the forward movement of history,"[22] i.e., the male characters are a vestige of backwardness that hinders the emancipation of women. Hence, every attempt to interact with them ends in instances of domestic violence. The author builds up a narrative in which the male dialogues are imbued with collective scorn against atypical behavior from women. Unfortunately, that comportment is only challenged by outsiders, so the village is like an oasis that breeds all sorts of injustice. To illustrate, a group of men gossip about Raushan, who conflicts with her husband. "Exile me to Siberia a thousand times, but if she were my wife, I would have slashed her back…Don't you see that where the husband is bad, the wife walks with her head held high?" [23] declares one of them, voicing out these abusive proclivities in a hyperbolic manner.

Similarly, the interaction between male and female characters in cities functions in favor of patriarchy. Discussing the differences between women in cities and villages, the audience expects the male protagonists to be more educated and less misogynistic. The author, however, develops a distinct plot in which men "enlightened" with Soviet education can harm the heroines. Visiting the city for the first time, Raushan and her friend stumble upon a man named Äbdish, who introduces himself as an educated, wealthy urban man. Impressed by his socioeconomic status, the women conclude that he is an exemplary and positive figure.[24] The author employs several techniques to build a

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[22] Katherina, Clark, "The Positive Hero in Pre-revolutionary Fiction," in *The Soviet Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 46.

[23] "Басымды мың жерден Сібірге айдаса да, өз қатыным боса, тіліп-тіліп алар едім…Байы жаман болған соң, басынып отырғанын көрмейсің бе? " Ibid, 39.

[24] "Әбдішті көтере мақтап: «Ақша істеп шығарушы екен, өте оңды жігіт екен», — деді." Ibid, 25.

picture of a civilized man. He locates him in the city, pictures him as helping lost women, and has him advising them on fitting the city aesthetic. Later in the novel, however, the impression of Äbdish as a righteous man changes abruptly when he abuses Raushan's friend Dametken in a bar. Although he speaks the words of the educated man, he is not devoid of personal interests. "The era of equality. Women should stop fearing. They must spend time carelessly with those whom they love. The era when a woman had to go and be a wife to a man she did not love is gone; now is the time of women's liberation," [25] he states at the bar.

In contrast with the previous lines, mentioning the wife's role matters as it emphasizes the conflict between the social status that reinforces oppression and liberation that opposes it. Although the character feigns support for the liberation project, the author does not idealize his behavior. Instead, he reveals that the outer "enlightened" layer may often be misleading, addressing the idea that words about liberation are insufficient to achieve it. "I am scared of educated men. I stopped believing that they have a conscience," [26] Raushan says, expressing her disappointment and admitting that some people use liberation discourse to influence someone.

Contrary to the image of the oppressed women, there are also portrayals of characters who fight for their rights. In the episode above, where men mock Raushan's rebelliousness, the heroine stands up for herself, too. Identifying one's weakness, she addresses the issue: "Poor people are suffering from taxes because of you…Leave your

[25] "Теңдік заманы. Әйелдер бұрынғыдай именуді қою керек. Көңілі сүйген адамымен ойнап-күлуі керек. Сүймеген адамына қатын болып баратын заман қазір өтті, қазір - әйел бостандығының заманы." Ibid, 22.
[26] "Оқыған еркектерден қорқам. Оқыған еркекте ар-ұят бар дегенге нанудан кеттім…" Ibid, 31.

tricks behind, and if you would pay, do it today, or I will inform the administration and call a person to sell your cattle for taxes." [27] Raushan acts as the protagonist, whose life is built upon inspiring other females; it is very political and personal at the same time. The author gifts her with abilities to withstand the dire circumstances of patriarchy because the hero trope who does not inspire others would not make sense.[28] In the larger plot, Raushan's confrontation of injustices is an example of the thousands of women with the same background as her. The interaction with male figures in the text is structured to showcase Raushan's facing the central struggle of young Soviet women. She epitomizes a successful outcome of the Sovietization program by following what Kudaibergenova referred to as the "little hero trope." [29] Mailin shows her as someone with the qualities necessary to be an exemplary Soviet citizen. His uniqueness as the author is seen through his recognition of the characters as Raushan, allowing them to absorb the actual Soviet values and consolidate their pedagogical influence on the following generations.

Conflicts between the Women

The Old vs The Young Women

The contrast between old and young women builds the women's first categorization of women in the novel. A jarring juxtaposition is made between their participation in social life. Mailin shows that an older woman can participate in the

[27] "Сіздің кесіріңізден былайғы кедейлерге салық ауыр түсіп отыр…Тәлкекті қойып, төлейтін болсаң, бүгін төле, әйтпесе болысқа айтып, малыңды сатуға адам шығарам!" Ibid, 42.

[28] Clark, 49.

[29] Diana Kudaibergenova, "The Formations of Soviet Literary Canons" in *Rewriting the Nation in Modern Kazakh Literature: Elites and Narratives* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 38 .

discussion, whereas a young woman should abstain from comments. In quite a literal sense, older females occupy the central part of the house (tör), creating a clear sense of hierarchy. They eschew interaction with the younger generation in order to assert their dominance. Mailin assigns negative meanings to such dialogues, for they foster a morally wrong engagement in gossip. He voices the state's concern that it is a relic of backward culture. Like in criticizing men, older women pepper their peers with questions about the need to involve more women in political life. As Raushan comes back from the regional meeting, she encounters a group of older women who state:

> When it comes to us, we have made everything we were capable of, it's all one to us. What is wrong with this young girl who hangs out among people.[30]

Old women can only count on the kinds of social mobility (in particular, moving from a *kelin* to a respected older wife) they experience. They normalize the indigenous patriarchy because, in contrast to the external liberation idea, old customs grant an ontological security.[31] Thus, old women happily institutionalized the way of life in which the list of duties shrunk to confining themselves in one place and caring for their families. The young people should adhere to their model. Until then, the idea of enduring the tyranny of the older counterpart is a normality, if not a canon of her bleak marital existence.

"The world has changed for the worse. When we were young, we could not lock up those *biis* (political representatives), let alone look at their faces…We never thought to see ourselves higher than those people…" [32] shared one of the women, hailing the old

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[30] "Біз келсек, жасарымызды жасаған адамбыз, бізге бәрібір. Жас басымен ел қыдырып мына шіркінге не жоқ екен?!" Ibid 10-11.

[31] Northrop, 87.

[32] "Ай, заман азды ғой. Кешегі біздің жас күндерімізде, ол Би ағаларды қараңғы үйге жабу түгіл, жан бетіне қарай алмаушы еді…Өзіміз өткен өмірімізде сол кісінің үстіне кіріп көрген емеспіз…" Ibid, 6.

order in the village. A young woman commenting on it immediately receives verbal abuse with hints of a non-verbal threat, too. "Don't sit back looking at *tör*, the untamed one, or is your life filled with much joy here?!*"* [33] comments one of the old women at the novel's beginning. The readers are submerged in the intricacies of the antagonistic relationships between two age groups. The aggressor is always right to the conservative audience, and this behavior enlarges the gap between the two generations, too. The helplessness of the younger women naturally draws them closer to the Soviet reader, who awaits the cathartic moment of "revenge" in the immediate future.

Another feature that differentiates the two groups is their attitude towards the Soviet system. The older women are skeptical of the new power in the steppe, while the younger ones think of it as a chance to grow beyond the low ceiling of their opportunities. For the comparison, look at the undertones in which they mention communism.

The old woman exclaims that "The communists have organized a meeting…They will register anyone as a communist who will go there. The person who has become a communist won't see the face of Allah in another world." [34] Not only does she implicitly connect Islam with the old ways, but she also binds the idea of being a communist to being an infidel who propagates sinful ideas. It is indeed a common trope to perceive communism as a destroyer of the faith. Roosien discusses the case with a photo of a mosque in the Komsomol Club in Soviet Uzbekistan. She explains how this radical change turned the Uzbek people into passive observers of how "the mosque the

[33] "Төрге қарап жүреңнен отырма, жүгенсіз кеткен, қайбір ырысың қаулап бара жатыр еді?!" Ibid, 7.

[34] "Съезді коммунистер шақырыпты.. Съезге барғандарды коммуниске жазады. Коммунист болған адам ол дүниеде алданың дидарын көрмейді." Ibid, 5-6.

Komsomol was ostensibly taking for the people, they were taking from the people."[35] In contrast, for the young women in the novel, communism is a way to get out of the darkness. In one of the episodes, a young woman who was taken as a second wife and suffered from serial domestic violence addresses Raushan:

> I don't know who a communist is, but I have heard they help women. If it is right, let them help me, let them free me from [his] cane. I would be grateful to convert into Christianity if they save me from that![36]

The excerpt portrays communism as a savior of the young women. Placing young women at the crossroads of two radically different schools of thought, the author provides a perspective on how a single act of conversion endows young women with new social identities. He emphasizes the new regime's revolutionary countercultural role in liberating women. What should also be noted, however, is the fact that most of those converts are fleeing from the patriarchal and abusive system, having no idea what will await them. Although they act according to Soviet values, they are deeply perplexed about the outcome of this pseudo-progress.

Mailin asserts the Soviet state's intentions to lift the members of the oppressed social group by granting them a choice to live, love, and explore the rich milieu around them. Replying to the threat of marrying her to the older man, an unnamed woman states, "I do not need you; I will marry the one I love."[37] The freedom to marry by love is a fundamental right for young women. This idea is central to the liberation campaign among nomadic women, for it was facilitated using transforming marital customs like

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[35] Roosien, 2.

[36] "Коммунистің не екенін білмеймін, бірақ әйелдерге болысады дегенді есіткенім бар еді. Болысатыны рас болса, маған болыссын, мені мынаның таяғынан құтқарсын. Осы бәледен құтқаратын болса, шоқындырып жіберсе де ризамын!" Ibid, 43.

[37] "Сенің керегің жоқ, сүйгеніме қосыламын." Ibid, 6.

polygyny, bridal kidnapping, and settlements. So, the women disapproved of the old traditions in favor of individualism. The author accentuates this power in the women's hands by transforming them into the agents of their own lives. [38]

Moreover, Mailin purposefully correlated young women with the Soviet state's values. In her book dedicated to the representation of nationhood in literary texts, Kudaibergenova listed typical descriptions of the protagonists. Authors like Beimbet Mailin, for instance, actively engaged in the canonization of the new female narrative of Kazakh women, who were transformed "from voiceless victims and honored bodies of their tribes into talented, emancipated, and educated women, women-communists, women-workers who equally with men start building the new Soviet society." [39] These excerpts construct the narrative in which communism is perceived as an attainable commodity. The price of loyalty to the new regime's promising slogans is leaving the old life behind.

Overall, the novel's binary of old and young women is apparent. When the older generation is associated with being antagonistic and representing backwardness, young women, by their age, are privileged to question these beliefs. They are given the option to choose between two worlds: the one that imposes patriarchal values and the one that opens new doors toward emancipation. Consequently, in these texts, the pro-Sovietness of the younger generation is natural because it is the only way to escape the horrors of institutionalized violence.

[38] Kudaibergenova, 27.

[39] Kudaibergenova, 29.

The Urban vs The Rural Women

The logic behind including this category is self-explanatory. Change of place ipso facto generates distinctions in people's appearance, habits, and moral values. A village woman who has seen the wonders of city life would never be the same. Raushan's first encounter with urbanization is canonical. She, along with her female friend, was shocked by the landscape and by the city dwellers:

-Dämetken, look at this!... Woah, what can I say? Did she cut her hair short?

-Look at her dress!

-How shocking!...

-This one has bare legs…

-Maybe it is sorcery…[40]

Researching the cultural meaning behind textile production in Central Asia, Roosien indicates how possessing a quality fabric signals the important economic status of the owner and the crucial social interaction. Discussing the Uzbek poem "My Silk Dress," she highlights that materials like silk are associated with festivity, tactility, materialism, and modernization.[41] Her discourse about Uzbek women concludes that

[40] "Дәметкен, мынаны қарашы!..Ойбай-ау, не бетімді айтайын, мына шіркін шашын қырқып қойған ба?-Көйлегін қара! -Масқара!..-Мынау бәлең жалаң аяқ қой…-Бетім-ай, сиқыр шығар…" Ibid, 17.

[41] Claire Roosien, "'I Dress in Silk and Velvet': Women, Textiles and the Textile-Text in 1930s Uzbekistan." Central Asian survey 41.1 (2022)

"textiles communicated women's contribution to socialist construction and linked them to other working women throughout Uzbekistan and in the Soviet Union more broadly." [42]

Hence, the dialogue above perfectly captures the moment of fascination with external factors. From the author's perspective, women like Raushan and Dämetken should first witness the differences between the two environments. One cannot deny that their surprise with new trends is unprecedented. It is a fairytale-like element of how the provincial woman meets her dream life. The modern state of self-expression that seemed so distant is closer to them. Hence, the gap between the two worlds is shrinking, too.

Moreover, the author introduces another heroine to the novel, Mariyam, an exemplary model of the city woman. Her speech, manners, and possessions are new yet sympathetic to other women. For instance, her personal space is described as:

> "There is no furniture in her room: an iron bed in the corner, a table, and some chairs. The table is filled with a book and a row of pictures." [43]

The minimalist arrangement of the apartment is associated with being orderly and disciplined. An iron bed seems to suggest both modernity and asceticism. Books and pictures indicate Mariyam's intellectual curiosity and openness.[44] Her words also fit an image of the ardent Soviet emancipation supporter. Prior to the meeting in the city, Raushan heard her speech at women s'iezd (съезд) in the village:

[42] Roosien, 14.

[43] "Бөлмесінде ешбір жиһаз жоқ, бұрышта темір кереует, бірер стол, орындықтар тұр. Стол үсті ішкі текшелеп жиналған кітап, қатарлап қойған толып жатқан суреттер." Ibid, 18.

[44] See Clark for more information on the aesthetics of pro-Soviet literary heroes.

> Liberation does not come by itself. For freedom to come, those who have seen hardships must themselves struggle for it…The Soviet state is trying its best to make a woman stand on equal foot with a man…Women must participate in that themselves too," [45] stated Mariyam.

The content of the speech promotes the agenda of the Soviet system. It embodies concepts of emancipation that should come within these women, too. In the beginning, Raushan could not understand her; Mariyam was dressed like a Russian woman, [46] communicated differently [47] and overall, her figure was mysterious. All outer differences aside, however, Mariyam represented an ordinary woman who wished to lift her fellow. She pursued an interest in seeing her grow both in a professional and personal sense. Closer to the final episodes, Mariyam opens up that:

> The reason I have brought you here is to make you see the city with its great marks and its cultural life, to differentiate between the good and the bad and learn from it.[48]

As a Soviet realist writer, Mailin imbedded modernization motives through people like Mariyam. They exercised a ruling power from anywhere, which showed that visiting the city was sometimes secondary. Thousands of villagers like Raushan can get in touch with the spirit of civilization and progress through missionary figures such as Mariyam. Clark describes the development of such mentor-disciple literary trope, in which some characters guide others for a noble cause. [49] Therefore, characters like

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[45] "Бостандық өздігінен келмейді. Бостандықты алу үшін кемдік көрген адамның өзінің тырысуы керек. Әйелге теңдік алып берем, әйелді еркекпен" Ibid,14.

[46] "Орысша киінген әйел бала" Ibid, 14.

[47] "Не еткен сөзшең еді деп Раушан бетіне қарай қалды. Сөзі Раушанға түсініксіз, өмірінде есітпеген сөздері бар" Ibid, 18.

[48] "Сені ертіп осында алып келгендегі мақсатым - ұлы дүкенді - мәдениет ошағы болған қалалы жерді - көріп, көзі ашылсын, жақсы-жаманды көріп, ысылсын дегендік еді." Ibid, 31.

[49] Clark, 142-144.

Mariyam have demystified words of the Soviet state-made flesh, a physical extension of the state's power in any location.

When it comes to the image of village women, it overlaps that of the old times. The author turns the critique and negativity from village women into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Their life centers around gossiping about more successful people like Raushan. The heroine admits what she detests in all villagers:

She hated the women who gossiped more than the demon. Not only those women, but all women in the village are like this.[50]

Raushan's aversion to older women is a natural reaction. The resentment gradually grows larger, encompassing every object related to them. Their houses that are associated with filth and destruction become an instance of it:

> A black stove covered with soot, a trunk missing a detail, a torn and filthy felt carpet on the floor, a shelf by the threshold, a broken dish on it, and a plate.[51]

Mailin's descriptions hint at the apparent imperfections, reinforcing the reader's unsympathetic take on the villager's life. All these details are symbols of the past that should be left behind. The adjectives like "torn," "filthy," and "broken" matter as they emphasize that it is not just a lack of possessions but general filth and decay. The quality of materials also plays a substantial role. As Roosien discusses in I Dress in Silk and Velvet': Women, Textiles and the Textile-Text in 1930s Uzbekistan, "the wealthier the families, the finer the textiles; the most expensive and prestigious fabrics were, of course,

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50 "Өсекші, улы тілді әйелдерді әзірейілден бетер жек көрді. Жалғыз бұлар ғана емес, ауылдың әйелдерінің бәрінің қалпы - осы." Ibid, 38.

51 "Бояуы көшкен қара қожалақ пеш, тісі сынған қара сандық, жерге төсеген шоқпыт құрым киіз, босағада тұрған сөре, сөре үстіндегі кетік шара, аяқ-табақ." Ibid, 42.

silk and velvet." [52] According to the descriptions mentioned above, the ones who owned felt carpets do not have the status of those who owned woven ones. Looking at the external differences, the binary between the old and the young women restates itself again.

Accordingly, the village women carry an air of chaos within themselves. For instance, it fills the space where they enter:

> "The door has opened, and it was Kulzipa, who brought the cold from outside and sat near the fireplace with her old shoes." [53]

The readers juxtapose the woman's presence with lousy weather and time-worn objects. That instance of parallelism is not unique to the novel. Mailin's repertoire is filled with short stories that accentuated the backwardness of the pre-Soviet times. For example, an internal conflict between collectivization and private ownership is seen in the short story Qara Shelek (The Black Bucket) short story. The protagonist, Aisha, gives away her beloved bucket to a neighbor woman and regrets it because when she takes it back, there is a hole at the bottom because of the other woman's negligence. There is a strong parallel between the neighbor woman and Aisha, for the former breaks the possession and is portrayed as disordered like other negative women in the novel. At the same time, the latter is poor but careful of her possessions, especially the bucket. That conscientiousness and sense of order make her the ideal person to take on the role of village representative.

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[52] Roosien, 4.

[53] "Есік ашылып еді, Күлзипа екен, даладағы суықтың бәрін үйге кіргізе, жаман кебісінің басы қайқайып, пешке келіп сүйенді." Beimbet Mailin, "Qara Shelek," (Almaty: Jazushy, 1974), 40.

As a whole, the category of city and village women is drawn to build the binary between independent, expressive, culturally aware and uneducated, passive, ignorant women. The author denies the notion that the old should be revered. On the contrary, the old is condemned and should be replaced by progressive new ideas. The models of women I have presented above build a picture of those worthy of the Soviet liberation slogan. Those were young women who strived to gain new knowledge and self-expression. However, an essential prerequisite for the transformation was their exposure to the injustices of provincial patriarchal life.

Estrangement (Downsides of the Emancipation)

Throughout the work, I have repeatedly stated how young women compete to be worthy of the identity of liberated women. Their value as an individual is defined by conforming to the system that repents "backward" provincial life and canonizes little heroes who built themselves from the ruins of their personal lives. What remains untold, however, is the sacrifice with which one's affinity to the system is consolidated. [1]The story of Raushan becoming a Communist woman is also the story of her being distanced from her contemporaries. What did not fit into the Bolshevik dream was how social actors like her were separated from everything that defined them earlier. For the characters, who undergo massive transformation in so little time, it expresses a prohibited impulse to reflect on those changes. The transition from one period to another is not concluded correctly, opening a room for analyzing their inner anxieties and experiences. This section explores the other side of emancipation, where the main heroine not only

divorces herself from the institution of the family but witnesses the hardships of a progressive society along the way.

"Raushan has fallen into the pit of despair every time Bäken did not return home…She could not sleep at night and her eyes willed the sun to rise,"[54] narrates the author, capturing the heroine's emotional dependence on her partner. The female audience sympathizes with Raushan, for they understand that not her actions but Bäken's ignorance is jeopardizing the relationships. Although the heroine understands that implication, she does not voice her concerns regarding the conflict. When she ponders that "There was no flaw in her performance other than being humiliated for being a woman,"[55] Raushan attempts to find justice in her environment. Her anxieties are imprinted as rhetorical questions that remain largely unanswered. "If I offended him, why would he not say it to my face? Why would he not place my fault on my head and punish me?"[56] she cries out, addressing her concerns about the lack of communication in the relationship. At last, when she asks, "Where is your promise that you would not hurt me?"[57] , we notice a cry for help from a woman whose expectations about a happy marriage face a bleak reality.

The relationship between Raushan and her husband, Bäken, strikes the readers as the most dramatic plot development in the novel. It consists of a simple observation of how the peaceful co-existence of the newlyweds slowly turns into a display of unhealthy

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54 "Бәкен үйге келмеген сайын, Раушан көңілсіздікке түсе берді...Түн бойына ұйықтай алмай, көрер таңды көзімен атқызып жүрді." Ibid, 38.

55 "Атың әйел деп кемітпесе, еңбегімде кемдік болған емес..." Ibid, 43.

56 "Қиянатым болса, бетіме неге ашып айтпайды? Кінәмды мойныма қойып отырып, жазамды неге бермейді?... Mailin, 43.

57 "Мені ренжітпеймін дейтінің қайда?" Ibid, 40.

behavior. Although the husband's abusive comportment supports the patriarchal society's narrative, it is crucial to look at the denouement of their interaction from the perspective of the main heroine. Close to Raushan's last days of staying in the village, Bäken leaves the house. Being pressured by the village's elders to control his wife's actions, he indirectly confronts Raushan by distancing himself from her. Not only is it an expression of obedience to local male authority, but an unveiling of his fragile ego that is destined to make him lose her under the aegis of toxic masculinity and excessive pride. In one of the episodes where Bäken directly engages in domestic violence, he kicks Raushan with his feet and makes her zhaulyq (headscarf) fall off. [58] his event becomes a turning point in Raushan's evolution into an independent woman because she non-verbally resists the traumatic downsides of the marriage union.[59] Getting rid of the adornment, which recognized her as a wife and bound her to the old customs, combines inner changes brewing inside the heroine. Mailin directs her toward the "unveiled" path of Sovietization by unveiling her.

Not only does the relationship between Raushan and Bäken culminate in aggressiveness, but additional emotional trauma comes from the villagers. The heroine's decision to manage the village's administration spurs a backlash among the locals. Initially, the country dwellers only gossip about Raushan, but they physically distance themselves from her later in the novel. "You are following the spoiled one and wish to become one yourself. I do not want to see her with you again! "[60] an old woman dictates to her daughter, who wants to join Raushan in doing household chores. The villagers

[58] "Аяғымен теуіп жібергенде, Раушан шалқасынан барып құлады. Жаулығы ұшып түсті." Ibid, 41.

[59] Northrop, 87.

[60] Азғынға еріп, азайын деп жүр екенсің, ендігәрі соған ергеніңді көрейін!" Ibid, 37.

gradually build an antagonistic attitude towards Raushan, accelerating her departure from the place. The village named Bostandyq, which means "freedom" in Kazakh, ironically symbolizes the concentration of old traditions that held the heroine unreceptive to liberation. Dissociating from the community of her husband and fellowmen, Raushan embarks on a journey of Soviet enlightenment. Mailin asserts that this journey irrevocably shifts personal priorities in her life. The heroine exchanges a social status that required her weakness and submission to the old system for the promising but unforeseeable future under Soviet rule.

Generally, the concept of gender order has not been thoroughly researched in the local historico-literary studies. The number of works dedicated to exploring the intricacies of liberation in the empire's periphery has been minimal because a large body of historical evidence remains unexplored. [61] Consequently, it is no wonder that many scholars have unstated the irreversible change in the lives of educated women like Raushan.

In *The Communist Raushan*, we see a story in which a woman travels from village to city, receives an education, obtains the right to build her professional career, and later faces difficulties returning to the reality of the stagnant household. After such transformations, the mind that expanded its boundaries could never shrink back to its original state. Intellectuals like Mailin strived to create texts narrating the difficulty of the transition from patriarchal to emancipated life and the reverse direction. He, in particular, explains the problematic implication of the liberation movement in Kazakh ASSR

[61] Tatsiana Shchurko, " "The Orient Woman": Soviet Gender Order in Central Asia Between Colonisation and Emancipation" in *Notions of the Soviet in Central Asia* (Bishkek: Shtab-Press, 2016), 179.

through the heroine's life. With all the privileges offered, such as receiving a state education, Raushan's image as an ordinary village dweller drastically changes to that of a literate member of urban society. Her husband unexpectedly meets her returning to the city and states, "Raushan!.. The one who was the village wife three years ago…Raushan then and now is like night and day. Raushan has now finished school, received education, and is an upstanding political activist." [62] The heroine has undergone what Ubiria mentions as "social engineering," in which the Bolsheviks participate in identity-building projects among the natives. [63] Although the success of such incentives in Kazakh ASSR is evaluated by how close the characters turn to Soviet power, Mailin also showcases how distant they become from their contemporaries. Liberation among Kazakh women was conflicting in the severity of such consequences. Whereas the scholarly emancipation discourse mainly revolves around the resonance among settled women, the effect of liberation among the nomadic tribes is underrepresented. Hence, if one disapproved of emancipation, donning the physical attribute as a veil and returning to old routines was a feasible and preferred outcome for the former, while changing identity was more severe and squarely frowned upon among the latter minority.

[62] "Бұдан үш жыл бұрынғы - ауыл әйелінің бірі болған Раушан!..Ондағы Раушан мен қазіргі Раушанның арасы жер мен көктей, қазіргі Раушан: мектеп бітірген, білім алған, саясатқа ұстарман." Ibid, 54.

[63] Grigol Ubiria, "Soviet Emancipation of Kazakh and Uzbek women" in Soviet *Nation-Building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations* (London: Routledge, 2016), 188-190.

Conclusion

The project's title quotes the novel, stating that nothing remains of the old times. On the one hand, it signifies overturning the old practices and customs that are not necessarily associated with backwardness. On the other hand, the pre-Soviet era is directly juxtaposed with the Soviets, destined to lose in the contest for winning the reader's sympathy. I explored this dichotomy in the context of the liberation movement in Soviet Kazakhstan. Analyzing the primary source, I focused on how it represented the perception of emancipation among the old and new generations. It should come as no surprise that older people saw women's rights as largely irrelevant, while younger people were passionate about accepting the liberation slogan. Likewise, younger women were elected to spread the Soviet enlightenment because of the preexisting norms that legitimized their oppression in society. The Soviet Kazakh author Mailin was responsible for building a discourse on how the woman question developed in Kazakh ASSR. For him, engaging women in the state's political life was equivalent to changing social order. His novel *The Communist Raushan* narrates the life of a Communist party member who faced numerous challenges in embodying the ideals of Soviet women's role. She embraces emancipation by confronting negative social opinions, religious prejudices, and personal crises. By doing so, the heroine acts as a role model for young women whose lives were to improve in allegiance with Soviet power. Answering the questions of women's liberation in the Kazakh steppes, I clarified that a request to change physical attributes, like the initiatives in Soviet Uzbekistan, would not yield results in the region. The state had to rely on many socio-cultural factors, like changing attitudes toward religion, education, and personal relationships, to enlighten the masses. However, the

consequences remained the same. As Grigol Ubiria recalls in Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations, such actions "alienated native communists and their families from their immediate social environment." [64] I conclude that while the effects of emancipation among settled women can be undermined, the implications for nomadic women were irreversible. This statement has been under-researched by scholars, for most historical evidence stems from the policies carried out in regions like Soviet Uzbekistan. [65] Investigating the history behind liberating nomadic women, thus, holds potential as a separate research topic.

[64] Ubiria, 191.

[65] See Marianne Camp's "The New Woman in Uzbekistan" (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

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