COMPLICATING THE COLONIAL GAZE:

WOMEN TRAVELERS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CENTRAL ASIAN WOMEN

by

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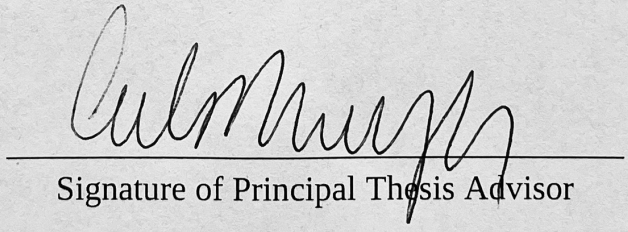

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To Akhan,

for your unwavering support and your unshakable belief in me.

And to all the women—past, present, and future—

whose strength and visibility have always mattered, even when unrecognized.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of Sart and Kazakh women in the travel narratives of Russian and British women travelers to Central Asia during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century. While much scholarship on colonial travel writing has focused on male-authored texts, this study addresses the underexplored role of women in constructing colonial knowledge. Drawing on the works of figures such as Lucy Atkinson, Maria Nalivkina, Annette Meakin, Anna Rossikova, and others, the thesis identifies two dominant narrative strategies among women travelers: imitation of male-authored colonial discourse and the development of more nuanced portrayals informed by gendered access to indigenous women's spaces. While some women travelers replicated dominant tropes of imperialist literature—depicting Central Asian women as idle, overworked, or veiled victims—others offered more humanized and layered depictions that complicated the colonial gaze.

Using a theoretical framework grounded in the work of Mary Louise Pratt, Gayatri Spivak, and Rosalind O'Hanlon, this study interrogates how gender shaped travel writing and influenced the production of colonial knowledge. Through discourse analysis and close reading of travelogues and ethnographic accounts, it explores how the unique positionality of women travelers both constrained and enabled their representations of indigenous women. Ultimately, the thesis argues that women-authored narratives, while still embedded within imperial ideologies, occasionally disrupted dominant masculine frameworks and expanded the scope of representation in colonial literature.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century, following the establishment of Turkestan as a Russian colony, Central Asia became a focal point for extensive travel and ethnographic study by European and Russian explorers. These travelers, both male and female, produced narratives that shaped prevailing perceptions of Central Asian societies. Much of the existing scholarship on travel literature and postcolonial studies has focused on male-authored accounts, emphasizing their role in constructing colonial discourses. However, women travelers and ethnographers also contributed to these representations, yet their accounts have received comparatively less attention. This thesis examines how women travelers and ethnographers represented Sart and Kazakh women. While male writers often relied on stereotypical tropes—portraying Central Asian women as oppressed and in need of rescue—some female authors pushed back against these representations by offering more complex portrayals that emphasize indigenous agency, highlighting the complexities of local women's lives beyond simplistic colonial stereotypes. By analyzing the works of female travelers from Russia and England, this thesis identifies two distinct narrative strategies. The first mirrors the tone and content of male-authored texts, resulting in superficial depictions of local women. The second leans more heavily into ethnographic observation and closer interaction with indigenous populations, leading to more complex and layered representations. These latter accounts diverge from dominant colonial narratives and offer a broader perspective on the lives of Central Asian women.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the terminology used throughout this thesis, particularly the terms *Sart* and *Kazakh*, which appear frequently in both historical sources and

modern scholarship. The exact meaning of *Sart* has been the subject of ongoing debate. As Sergei Abashin notes, mid-19th century ethnographic encounters with the region prompted scholars to reconsider the criteria used to define the group—whether based on language, lifestyle, customs, or appearance. If defined by language, *Sarts* might be categorized as Turkic; if by way of life or customs, they could be linked to Iranian groups.[1] However, rather than indicating a fixed ethnic identity, the term *Sart* was most likely a socioeconomic label, referring broadly to the settled, urban population engaged in trade and crafts, in contrast to nomadic groups such as the Kazakhs. The terminology for Kazakhs was also inconsistent in 19th-century sources. They were commonly referred to as *Kirghiz* or *Kaisak-Kirghiz*, while the group now known as the Kyrgyz were typically labeled *Kara-Kirghiz*. This thesis focuses primarily on the representation of Sart and Kazakh (referred to as Kirghiz) women, as these were the groups most frequently written about in the sources analyzed.

Women travelers occupied a unique position within the colonial encounter, as their gender often granted them access to spaces and interactions unavailable to their male counterparts — most notably, the inner homes of indigenous women. This privileged access enabled them to witness aspects of local women's lives that male travelers could not observe firsthand. However, access alone did not always lead to more empathetic or nuanced portrayals. Some female travelers adopted the tone and frameworks of male explorers, reproducing dominant colonial narratives. Others, however, diverged from these patterns by drawing on their gendered experience to present local women with more agency, complexity, and humanity. This thesis argues that women-authored sources expanded the scope of travel literature by offering

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[1] Sergei Abashin, "Vozvrashchenie sartov? Metodologiia i ideologiia v postsovetskikh nauchnykh diskussiiakh" (*The Return of the Sarts? Methodology and Ideology in Post-Soviet Scholarly Debates*), *Antropologicheskii forum*, no. 10 (2009): 253.

representations of Central Asian women that, while still shaped by colonial frameworks, had the potential to be more humanizing than those found in male-authored accounts. It addresses a gap in the scholarship by examining the gendered dimensions of travel writing and the role of female authors in shaping colonial knowledge.

Scope and Limitations

The geographical focus of this study is Russian Turkestan, with particular attention to representations of Sart and Kazakh women. The time frame is the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period when Russian colonial expansion in Central Asia was well-established and European travel to the region became more frequent. While this study engages with a broad range of sources, it does not attempt to analyze these travel narratives in their entirety. Instead, it focuses specifically on the ways in which Sart and Kazakh women were represented within them.

In selecting male authored sources, I focused on travelers who included representations of women in their narratives, as my goal was to track the representation of women in these accounts. Some travelers, however, chose not to include women at all in their writings, while others omitted descriptions of people entirely, focusing instead on geography, commerce, and industries. For example, Thomas Atkinson, the husband of Lucy Atkinson whom I analyze in this thesis, rarely mentions women in his book *Oriental and western Siberia*, with his primary interest being the local geography of which he made many paintings and sketches.[2] Other

[2] Thomas W. Atkinson, *Oriental and Western Siberia: A Narrative of Seven Years' Explorations and Adventures in Siberia, Mongolia, the Kirghis Steppes, Chinese Tartary and Part of Central Asia* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858).

authors, such as Voiekov, focused on agriculture.[3] Olufsen made general brief descriptions of the indigenous populations, but nothing specific about women.[4] Thus, I chose to focus on the accounts that contained substantial descriptions of indigenous women, such as Henri Moser, Schuyler, and George Gins. The sources of women-authored travel narratives are relatively limited, and I analyzed nearly everything that was available to me. As such, my selection of female travelers was constrained by the availability of their works. I intentionally excluded travelers whose works did not address women or whose focus was solely on historical, agricultural, industrial or geographical aspects, as these did not contribute to my analysis of gendered representations in the context of colonialism.

This thesis does not seek to deny or downplay the role of European and Russian women travelers in producing colonial knowledge. Scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt have pointed out that women, particularly through what she terms *exploratrices sociales*, were active participants in the colonial project, often reproducing imperial ideologies in the domestic and ethnographic spheres.[5] While these dynamics are acknowledged—especially in Chapter Three—the primary aim of this study is not to explore how women contributed to colonial discourse, but rather to examine the ways in which their writings occasionally diverged from dominant masculine frameworks. In focusing on these moments of narrative dissonance, the thesis investigates how gender shaped the representation of indigenous women and how female-authored texts complicated, rather than simply replicated, the colonial gaze.

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[3] A. I. Voiekov, *Ocherki Turkestana* [Essays on Turkestan] (St. Petersburg, 1913).

[4] O. Olufsen, *The Emir of Bukhara and His Country* (London: William Heinemann, 1911).

[5] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 2007), 156.

One important constraint of this thesis is the issue of language—both on the part of the travelers and on my own. Very few of the 19th-century travelers and ethnographers writing about Turkestan had substantial knowledge of the local languages. Their understandings of Central Asian women were often mediated through interpreters or based on surface-level encounters, which contributed to the repetition of familiar tropes rather than accurate or empathetic portrayals. Most of the travelers examined in this thesis used the services of a translator in their interactions with the indigenous population, with the exception of Vladimir and Maria Nalivkina, who spoke the local language. Likewise, I am also limited by language in my own analysis: I work primarily with English and Russian sources, which necessarily excludes texts written in other relevant languages, such as French or German. For example, in the case of Henri Moser, I rely on a Russian translation of his work rather than the original French, which may obscure certain nuances of meaning. While I have made every effort to engage critically with these texts, the reliance on translated materials is an unavoidable limitation.

Theory and Literature Overview

Edward Said's *Orientalism* argues that travel literature played a crucial role in constructing and perpetuating Western perceptions of the Orient.[6] Rather than offering original insights, many travelers relied on and reinforced established clichés about the Orient, contributing to a body of knowledge that served colonial interests.[7] These repetitive narratives did not merely describe the East but actively shaped it as a cultural and intellectual construct, reinforcing European superiority. Moreover, travel writing was often a means of self-fashioning

[6]Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). 192

[7] Ibid., 177.

for the traveler, as Said observes: "Like many other travelers he [Kinglake] is more interested in remaking himself and the Orient (dead and dry—a mental mummy) than he is in seeing what there is to be seen."[8] This suggests that rather than seeking an authentic understanding of the region, travelers projected their own fantasies and ideological biases onto the places they visited, further entrenching Orientalist discourse. I have found that both of these statements, that travelers tended to reproduce pre existing cliches and projected their own preconceived notions rather than trying to meaningfully understand indigenous people and their cultures, are true for travelers in Central Asia as well. I will further explore these notions in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Additionally, a significant critique of Said's work is its lack of attention to literature authored by women. His analysis primarily focuses on male colonial figures, overlooking the contributions and perspectives of women. Billie Melman, in *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, Sexuality, Religion and Work*, addresses this gap and challenges some of Said's key arguments. She examines how English women engaged with the Middle East, highlighting the intersections of gender, colonialism, and cultural exchange. Unlike male travelers, who often wrote from a position of superiority and control, Melman suggests that women travelers sometimes expressed a sense of identification with the "other," transcending religious, cultural, and ethnic boundaries.[9] Similarly, Sara Mills, in *Discourses of Difference*, engages with Said's ideas by incorporating gender into the discussion. She explores how colonialism and travel literature intersect, arguing that women "were unable to adopt the imperial

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[8] Ibid., 193.

[9] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, Sexuality, Religion and Work, 1718–1918*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1995), 8.

voice with the ease with which male writers did."[10] Mills describes their narratives as less assertive in promoting British rule, suggesting that gender influenced the ways in which women engaged with and represented colonial spaces.

While critiques of Said, such as those by Melman and Mills, highlight the role of gender in travel writing, another key expansion of *Orientalism* comes from Mary Louise Pratt. In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt shifts the focus from how travelers represented foreign lands to how they sought to *possess* them—both visually and intellectually. She discusses the idea of *imperial eyes* to describe how European travelers viewed unfamiliar landscapes as objects to be surveyed, categorized, and ultimately claimed. Additionally, her idea of the capitalist vanguard highlights how travelers often framed themselves as pioneers of economic and cultural transformation, portraying their journeys as precursors to trade, resource extraction, and colonial expansion. By emphasizing the relationship between vision, knowledge, and power, Pratt provides a useful framework for my understanding of how travelers in Central Asia framed their encounters

While Pratt focuses on how European travelers sought to possess foreign lands through vision and narrative, Gayatri Spivak raises a more fundamental question: can the colonized, particularly colonized women, ever speak within these dominant discourses? In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak argues that even when imperial texts claim to represent indigenous subjects, they do so through a European framework that renders these subjects voiceless.[11] Travel writing, as part of colonial knowledge production, often spoke for indigenous women rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. However, while Spivak's critique is essential for understanding the broader silencing effect of colonial discourse, it does not fully account for the

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[10] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, *Routledge eBooks*, 2003, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379882. 3.

[11]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66–111.

ways in which women travelers, operating within these constraints, sometimes introduced more nuanced portrayals of indigenous women. Unlike their male counterparts, who often wrote about local women without direct access to them, some female travelers engaged more closely with their subjects, describing their lives and agency in ways that complicate a Eurocentric narrative. Although these representations were still shaped by colonial ideologies, they suggest that indigenous women were not entirely erased but were, to some extent, represented—albeit through an imperial lens.

Rosalind O'Hanlon's critique of subaltern studies provides a valuable framework for further complicating this discussion. While Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak within colonial discourse, O'Hanlon challenges the assumption that subaltern voices are entirely irretrievable. She contends that while colonial texts impose limitations on indigenous representation, careful analysis can reveal traces of indigenous agency within these accounts.[12] This thesis builds on O'Hanlon's intervention by examining how women travelers in Central Asia, though embedded in imperial discourse, recorded aspects of indigenous women's lives that were often absent from male-authored accounts. While some female travelers imitated the scientific tone and narrative structures of their male counterparts, others—such as Annette Meakin, Maria Nalivkina, and Lucy Atkinson—offered ethnographic details that subtly disrupted colonial stereotypes. By analyzing these representations, this study explores how women travelers navigated the tensions between reproducing dominant narratives and documenting indigenous women's lived realities, revealing moments where subaltern voices emerge, however mediated they may be.

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[12] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 189–224.

While I will be discussing themes related to Said's notion of Orientalism and building on his discussion of how travel literature interplays with knowledge production and the representation of the East, I will primarily use Pratt's, Spivak's, and O'Hanlon's theories as the overarching frameworks for this thesis. Pratt's theoretical framework is particularly well-suited for analyzing travel literature, as it refines postcolonial discourse by focusing specifically on the narrative strategies within this genre. I will use Spivak's work to examine how colonial discourse constructs indigenous women as silent subjects. Her concept of the subaltern highlights the structural constraints that prevent colonized women from speaking for themselves in imperial texts. By applying Spivak's critique to travel writing, this analysis will assess whether and to what extent female travelers replicated these silencing mechanisms, and to what extent they offered space for more complex representations of indigenous women.

At the same time, O'Hanlon's critique of subaltern studies complicates this framework by challenging the notion that subaltern voices are entirely irretrievable. While she acknowledges the limitations imposed by colonial discourse, she also argues that subaltern agency can be partially recovered through close readings of historical texts. By incorporating O'Hanlon's perspective, this thesis moves beyond a binary approach that sees indigenous women as either entirely silenced or fully represented. Instead, it examines how women travelers, despite operating within imperial knowledge production, sometimes documented aspects of indigenous women's lives that male authors ignored. This theoretical combination allows for a more nuanced examination of the tensions between representation, authority, and the agency of the subjects depicted in these narratives.

In addition to broader theoretical discussions on imperialism and travel writing, it is important to acknowledge critiques that examine the peculiarities of Russian imperialism compared to the British and French models. Scholars such as Tolz and Knight argue that Russia's approach to the East was shaped by its own unique imperial context.[13] As Knight observes, "Unlike in the West, where orientalism was, above all, the study of the distant and exotic 'other', in Russia, the study of the East was the study of Russia itself."[14] This distinction is vital for understanding the different lens through which Russian travelers viewed Central Asia. While these critiques focus on the geopolitical and cultural context of Russia's imperialism, they are not immediately central to the main points of the thesis. The representations of Central Asian women by Russian women travelers, despite varying imperial backgrounds, largely follow the same patterns of colonial representation as seen in the works of their British and French counterparts. This similarity allows for a broader comparative analysis of portrayals of indigenous women across different imperial contexts.

Methods and Content Overview

This study employs discourse analysis to examine how travel narratives constructed representations of Central Asian women within the framework of colonial knowledge production. Rather than treating these texts as neutral descriptions, I will examine the language, framing, and rhetorical strategies used by travelers. This approach considers how male and female authors positioned themselves in relation to indigenous women, whether they reinforced dominant colonial tropes or introduced alternative perspectives. Key aspects of this analysis

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[13] Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[14]Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orengburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (2000), 79.

include identifying recurring stereotypes, assessing how authority and perspective shape the representation of local women, and examining moments where travelers' observations either upheld or complicated prevailing colonial assumptions. By applying this method, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which European travelers not only described but actively participated in shaping knowledge about Central Asian women. A comparative approach will also be used to highlight the differences between male and female authored texts, to assess in what ways women travelers brought more nuance to their portrayals of indigenous women or reproduced dominant colonial tropes.

Chapter One establishes the dominant colonial tropes regarding Central Asian women by analyzing how they were represented in male-authored texts. Key figures include Western travelers Henri Moser and Eugene Schuyler; as well as George Gins, Orest Shkapski, and other Russian colonial representatives. This chapter examines how these male travelers framed indigenous women within broader narratives of imperial conquest, portraying them as oppressed by indigenous patriarchy and in need of liberation. For Sart women, their idea of liberation meant taking off the veil, while for Kazakh women the practice of *kalim* was criticized as the commodification of women. While these men criticized indigenous society for marginalizing their women, they themselves marginalized indigenous women by reproducing stereotypes and silencing their voices.

Chapter Two explores the extent to which female travelers imitated male-authored narratives, demonstrating that access to indigenous women did not necessarily result in more nuanced representations. While women travelers had greater opportunities to observe and interact with local women, their portrayals often remained shaped by the same colonial assumptions as those of their male counterparts. This chapter examines the works of Anna

Rossikova, Iulia Golovnina, Olga Lobry, and Lucy Atkinson to assess the limitations of female-authored travel writing. I will be using Showalter's theory on the stages of female literature to frame that women authored travel literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be categorized into the Feminine stage. Thus, some women travelers strived to imitate the narratives of male travelers in tone and themes, imitating the style of writing of Pratt's capitalist vanguards and naturalists. Hence, their representation of indigenous women aligned with dominant colonial tropes.

Chapter Three shifts focus to women who challenged dominant colonial tropes, offering more complex and humanized portrayals of indigenous women. This chapter argues that while still constrained by imperial discourse, some female travelers provided representations that acknowledged the agency, resilience, and social roles of Central Asian women. Key figures include Maria Nalivkina, Annette Meakin, and Lucy Atkinson. Lucy Atkinson is repeated in both chapters as her travel narrative both reproduces colonial stereotypes about women, but also offer nuanced ethnographic depictions of the daily lives of Kazakh women. Here, I will offer a potential counterargument to Spivak by demonstrating that limited representation of indigenous women is possible by women travelers. While their accounts were still limited by colonial tropes, they sought to know Sart and Kazakh women, and thus represented them in their narratives in a more nuanced way.

Chapter 1

A True Slave:

Colonial Narratives about Central Asian Women

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which travelers, ethnographers, and colonial administrators constructed narratives about Central Asian women, turning the ethnographic gaze back onto the colonial actors themselves. While many of these writers criticized the treatment of women in Muslim societies, their own narratives often denied Central Asian women subjectivity. They were frequently homogenized, spoken for, or framed as passive objects of judgment rather than active agents in their own right. The accounts of European travelers, including Schuyler and Moser, reveal a tendency to observe and interpret local women through a lens of moral superiority, often without direct engagement. These travelers presumed the authority to determine whether a woman was "oppressed" without considering her perspective or whether the question itself was relevant to her lived experience. Even when they did interact with local women, they failed to interrogate their own assumptions.

The same imperial gaze manifests in the work of Russian ethnographers and administrators, who framed Central Asian women's status as a justification for colonial intervention. These writers depicted local women as victims of their societies, reinforcing the notion that Russian rule was necessary to "liberate" them. Through legal debates over *adat* and *sharia*, the rhetoric of unveiling as emancipation, and even portrayals of prostitution as a form of rebellion, Russian colonial discourse constructed an image of the Central Asian woman as doubly subjugated—first by her own traditions and then by the narratives imposed upon her by

the imperial state. To illuminate how these narratives functioned to erase indigenous women's voices while reinforcing imperial hierarchies, I draw on the theoretical frameworks of Mary Louise Pratt and Gayatri Spivak. By analyzing these varied but interconnected discourses, I demonstrate how colonial narratives about Central Asian women served not only to justify empire but also to silence the very women they claimed to liberate.

Theoretical Discussion

Mary Louise Pratt examines how Europeans exercised their hegemony over the colonized not just through overt mechanisms of control but through the rhetoric of travel literature itself. In her analysis, she offers a postcolonial framework for understanding how these narratives functioned, particularly through what she calls *anti-conquest*. This concept describes how European writers maintained an appearance of neutrality and benevolence while ultimately reinforcing imperial dominance. As Pratt explains, the traveler's gaze was not an act of mere observation but one of possession—what she describes as "he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess."[15] To look is not merely to see; it is to claim authority over what is being seen. In travel narratives, this act transforms indigenous women into objects of scrutiny, their lives and appearances cataloged and described in ways that erase their individuality and agency. *Imperial eyes* did not seek to understand or engage with its subjects but rather to reduce them into consumable images that affirmed the observer's dominance.

This gaze was not neutral—it actively shaped colonial narratives that justified intervention and control. Nowhere was this more evident than in representations of indigenous women, particularly in the writings of travelers and ethnographers in Russian Turkestan. As part

[15] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992)., 9.

of the broader civilizing mission, these authors constructed the image of the Eastern woman as the ultimate victim of her own civilization, reinforcing the notion that intervention was both necessary and justified. Regardless of their actual circumstances, travelers and ethnographers dedicated significant attention to portraying indigenous women as miserable and subjugated. The Central Asian woman became entrapped within the stereotype of the oppressed Eastern woman, her identity flattened into a singular narrative of victimhood. Among sedentary populations, Sart women were portrayed as repressed because they are idle and secluded, while among nomadic populations, Kazakh women were paradoxically seen as oppressed because of the physical labor they performed. This perspective persisted across numerous travel accounts, reinforcing colonial narratives of backwardness. Russian travelers in particular forced the narrative of the oppressed Central Asian woman, where they were not just victims of their own culture but literal slaves.

The construction of the Central Asian woman as oppressed and enslaved fits into Gayatri Spivak's critique of colonial rhetoric, famously encapsulated in the phrase, "white men saving brown women from brown men."[16] This framing positioned colonial powers as benevolent saviors, intervening to "liberate" women from the supposedly barbaric practices of their own cultures. In the case of Russian Turkestan, this narrative was weaponized to justify imperial rule and the imposition of Russian legal and administrative systems. Figures like Shkapskii and Gins perpetuated this imagery by portraying Central Asian women as victims of the common law, *adat* and *shariat*, in order to push for their own interests, such as tightening control or promoting resettlement policies. By emphasizing practices like *kalim* as evidence of women's commodification, Russian travelers and administrators obscured the complex realities of these traditions and their role in the social reality. Instead, they framed themselves as moral arbiters,

[16]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 92.

tasked with rescuing these women from their "enslaved" condition, thus advancing colonial domination under the guise of humanitarian concern. However, such narratives erase the voices and agency of the women they claim to protect. Central Asian women were transformed into objects of colonial discourse, spoken for by foreign travelers, ethnographers, administrators who shaped their identities to align with imperial objectives.

For Sart women, the thick black veil that they wore, a persistent focus in European travel writing on Central Asia, becomes a symbol of this supposed oppression. But what actually bothered the Europeans is the inability to see the women, not knowing what they look like. All travelers examined in this chapter described the veil as unpleasant in one way or another, and both Moser and Schuyler were frustrated that they could not see how Sart women looked like underneath the veil. Thus, the fixation on seeing the unveiled Sart woman was a recurring theme in travel literature. In some cases prostitution becomes connected with unveiling, framed as a first step to the liberation of women. Zekhni connects this obsession of unveiling with colonial control, noting, "The unseen and unknowable body of the indigenous Muslim woman provoked fear and reminded the imperial elite of what remained beyond direct gaze and, subsequently, control."[17] She argues that regulated prostitution in colonial Russian Turkestan became a tool for asserting dominance over indigenous women who would otherwise be inaccessible to colonial authority. Veiled indigenous women were often mythologized as "great seekers of love affairs," reinforcing the idea that unveiling them through prostitution would not only liberate them but also satisfy their supposed desires. In this way, the imperial gaze not only sought to render indigenous women visible but to consume and control them, transforming their bodies into sites of colonial conquest.

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[17] Zekhni, Malika. 2022. "Invisible Bodies: Civilising Mission, Sexuality, and Prostitution in Fin de Siècle Russian Turkestan." *Cultural and Social History* 19 (2): 141–59. doi:10.1080/14780038.2021.2008145, 144.

Ultimately, the narratives about Central Asian women were strikingly repetitive across different travel accounts, raising the question of whether these portrayals were based on firsthand observation or simply reiterations of preexisting stereotypes. Many Western travelers likely arrived in Central Asia with preconceived notions, shaped by earlier works they had read. As argued by Said, travelers often reproduced cliches established by their predecessors.[18] One of the most influential scholars and travelers to Central Asia of the 19th century was Arminius Vambery, whom both Schuyler and Moser mention in their books. Schuyler even added a translation of professor Grigorieff's review on Vambery's work *History of Bukhara from the Earliest Period down to the Present* to his appendix, stating in the footnotes that this may be "interesting and valuable to students of the East."[19]

In his book, *Travels in Central Asia*, Vambery rarely discussed the treatment of women in Central Asia, but when he did, they were depicted as literal slaves. His description of a "Turkoman Wife and Slave" illustrates how these narratives were constructed:

> The tent which I now occupied, in company with ten of my travelling companions, did not belong to Kulkhan, but was the property of another Turkoman who, with his wife--formerly his slave, sprung from the tribe of the Karakalpak--joined our party for Khiva. I learnt that their object in proceeding to Khiva was that this woman, who had been carried off in a surprise by night and brought hither, might ascertain whether her former husband, whom she had left severely wounded, had afterwards perished; who had purchased her children, and where they now were; and--which she was particularly anxious to know - what had become of her daughter, a girl in her twelfth year, whose beauty she described to me with tears in her eyes. The poor woman, by extraordinary fidelity and laboriousness, had so enchained her new master, that he consented to accompany her on her sorrowful journey of enquiry. I was always asking him what he

[18] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 177.
[19] Schuyler, *Turkistan*, vol. 1, 360.

> would do if her former husband were forthcoming, but his mind on that point was made up - the law guaranteed him his possession.[20]

The woman, who was once a slave, and now wife of Kulkhan is portrayed as a miserable being who was stolen away from her husband and child. It is unclear whether the woman was already a slave when she was kidnapped, or had become a slave after the kidnapping, and had she been rid of the slave status by becoming a wife to Kulkhan or not. Regardless, the language makes it clear of how she is treated: her husband is "her new master," and to him she is "his possession." There are two more instances in his book where he describes women being sold into slavery, the first being sold off by her own husband, and the second ended up in slavery after her family was attacked.[21] The framing of Central Asian women as slaves may have contributed to the perception of them by subsequent travelers. The fact that Vambery is referenced suggests a chain of textual borrowing, in which each successive traveler reproduced elements of an already established colonial narrative. In this sense, travel writing was not simply a reflection of reality but a self-referential discourse, reinforcing its own authority by citing and legitimizing previous work.

The perpetuation of the same narrative could also be a question of access. Men had no access to the *ichkari*, the inner quarters of the house where women resided. Thus, they could not judge properly how the Sart woman lives, jumping to the conclusion that she is idle and oppressed. In the case of Kazakh women, the situation is reversed: the travelers did not see how men contributed to the upkeep of the nomadic lifestyle. Thus, they arrived at the conclusion that the Kazakh men are lazy and the Kazakh women do all the work.In a survey of household

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[20] Arminius Vámbéry, *Travels in Central Asia* (London: John Murray, 1864), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41751/41751-h/41751-h.htm, ch VI.

[21] Ibid., ch. XII

responsibilities among the Eurasian nomads of the 18th to 20th centuries, it is noted that most travelers observed the nomadic lifestyle in auls during the summer months, when men's responsibilities typically took them outside the auls, whereas their domestic roles became more visible during the winter.[22] This would render the work of men invisible to the foreign onlookers. The authors also note that the import of factory goods into Central Asia in the 19th century rendered craftsmanship unnecessary, which was the domain of men. As such, many observers falsely came to the conclusion that nomadic men were idle and lazy, while women bore all of the responsibilities of sustaining the nomadic lifestyle

Henri Moser

Henri Moser traveled in Central Asia 1868 to 1890, with the main goal of his travels being commerce.[23] His interest in the region was commercial, and he later displayed Central Asian artifacts in European exhibitions.[24] Moser traveled through the region with local guides and published his travelog *A travers l'Asie centrale* in 1885, detailing his travels in Central Asia. He was also a member of several geographical societies.[25] Besides seeking commercial benefit from Russian Turkestan, Moser, like Pratt's capitalist vanguard, Moser is frustrated with the underdeveloped colony, critiquing the local architecture, the absence of water, and the dusty roads.[26] Thus, making his narrative fit into the capitalist vanguard trope.

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[22] Alexander D. Tairov and Nataliya A. Bersenova, "Khozyaĭstvennye obyazannosti muzhchin i zhenshchin v kochevykh obshchestvakh Tsentral'noi Evrazii XVIII – nachala XX vv," *Oriental Studies* 6, no. 14 (2021): 1274.

[23] Henri Moser and Napoléon Ney, *Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki o Tsentral'noi Azii: puteshestviia Napoleona Nei i Anri Mozera vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka*, trans. Snezhana Atanova (RAN, 2023), 22.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26]Ibid., 371.

When describing women, Moser relies on sweeping generalizations that reduce them to a set of racialized and essentialized traits. The depictions are reminiscent of "anthropological" description, where scientific language of the characteristics of race are used. Moser's portrayal of the "typical" Sart woman is a clear example of this:

> The Sart woman is usually of medium height. However, I have seen slender and graceful ones among the women from Kokand. Their main charm lies in their large almond-shaped eyes, the beauty of which they know how to accentuate with makeup... Their skin tone tends to be closer to dark brown, though there are some whose dazzling fairness is striking. Despite their small hands and feet, their gait is completely lacking in grace.[27]

In this description the Sart woman is given set characteristics, and deviations are presented as exceptions. From this description the reader is made to believe that all Sart women are of middle height, have almond eyes, have dark-brown skin color, small hands and feet and walk ungraciously. These generalizations leave little room for individuality, presenting any deviation from the norm as an outlier.

Beyond physical appearance, Moser imagines Sart women as leading idle and miserable lives. He states: "When managing the household is not part of a woman's duties, her existence becomes useless. She is a thing, not a thinking and feeling being aware of her own degradation, in which she remains thanks to Eastern civilization."[28] Here, Moser reduces the Eastern woman to an object, shaped entirely by her cultural surroundings. He portrays her as passive and degraded, blaming her supposed oppression on "Eastern civilization." He explicitly blames religion for this "oppressed state" of women: "Islam made women the lowliest, dirtiest and

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[27]Ibid., 262.

[28]Ibid., 366

despised being. She is forbidden to enter the mosque. When a Sart meets a woman outside, he averts his gaze elsewhere."[29] Moser's descriptions follow the broader colonial tendency to frame indigenous cultures as inherently oppressive to women, positioning European intervention as a moral imperative. His writing aligns with Spivak's critique of colonial rhetoric, where European men justify imperialism by claiming to "save" indigenous women from their own societies.

This homogenization of Central Asian women extends beyond their treatment within their own cultures—it also shapes how they are represented in colonial discourse. Moser includes an exchange where a Sart man allegedly justifies the veiling of women:

> A Sart, to whom a European was trying to demonstrate the advantages of our way of life—where a woman's beauty is like a flower that pleases the eye—replied:
>
> "Your women must be different from ours, since even a covered face and the threat of death for adultery are powerless to ensure their fidelity. And what would happen if their faces were uncovered? Don't forget: if a dog is the ideal of loyalty, then a woman is the ideal of deceit."[30]

This excerpt is revealing in several ways. First, Moser does not elaborate when or where this conversation took place, nor does he identify the speakers beyond their vague designations as "a European" and "a Sart." As Moser did not speak the Sart language and likely relied on interpreters, the authenticity of this exchange is questionable. Moreover, the anecdote closely resembles a story shared by Stremoukhov, published six years earlier, suggesting a possible case of borrowing or repetition.[31]

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[29]Ibid., 365.

[30]Ibid., 366.

[31]N. Stremoukhov, "V Srednei Azii: iz zapisok russkogo puteshestvennika," *Niva* 10, no. 24 (1879): 462–63, *Elektronnaia biblioteka Runivers*, https://runivers.ru/lib/book9158/480317/, 463. It will be analyzed and discussed later in the chapter.

Second, like in the previous example, the conversation serves to perpetuate the colonial stereotype of indigenous men treating their women poorly, valuing them less than a dog, which is probably why Moser included this piece in the first place. Most strikingly, the dialogue illustrates the erasure of women's voices. The European attempts to impose his cultural standards on the Sart woman through the mediation of a Sart man, while learning about her supposed nature from this same man. The Sart woman is reduced to an object of discussion, and Moser never considers seeking her perspective on the benefits of the European way of life. Instead, the woman is spoken about but never spoken to.

This need to define and control the Sart woman's image reflects what Mary Louise Pratt describes as the "imperial gaze"—a perspective that frames colonized subjects as passive objects to be observed, categorized, and dominated. The veil becomes a focal point of this gaze, a symbol that frustrates European travelers because it denies them visual access to the women they wish to scrutinize. Moser's descriptions exemplify this frustration:

> When going outside, the woman puts on a paranja, or fereji, that covers her from head to toe. It's a hideous robe made of silk and cotton, patterned in thin blue stripes[…] In this dress the woman looks as if she's sewn into a sack. It's useless trying to figure out how the woman looks: the black veil hides her thoroughly from unwanted onlookers.[32]

By likening the veil to a "sack" and lamenting his inability to see the woman underneath, Moser reveals his desire to visually possess the Sart woman. The phrase "useless trying to figure out how the woman looks" suggests a compulsion to unveil her, to make her visible under his colonial gaze. As Pratt argues, imperial travel narratives often construct a dynamic in which knowledge and control go hand in hand.[33] Here not seeing transforms into an urgent need to see,

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[32]Moser and Ney, *Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki*, 363-364.

[33] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 1992, 211.

and not knowing into an imperative to know. This impulse to unveil, to penetrate spaces meant to remain hidden, reinforces colonial authority by asserting the European's right to access and define the Other.

Moser does get to see the appearance of Sart woman without the robe and the veil. He describes extensively how she dresses and what jewelry she wears when she is in the safety of her quarters[34]. He finishes the description with the following sentence: "A European can see the Sart woman in such an attire furtively, when for example, he happens to peep into the secretive women's quarters of the Sart house."[35] Of course, the implication here is that he himself was able to see the Sart women in her homely attire without the veil by peeping into the woman's quarters. The need to see the appearance of the unveiled Sart woman was so strong that he was willing to cross boundaries and invade private spaces to satisfy his curiosity. This act of voyeurism underscores a colonial mindset that viewed local customs and the private lives of women as something to be penetrated and observed by Western eyes.

His observations of nomadic Kazakh women stand in contrast to his depiction of Sart women, yet he ultimately comes to the same narrative of the oppressed Eastern woman. In the following excerpt, Moser observed the migration of an aul, when the locals are settling into their new location and the women are setting up the yurts: "The women set up the yurts, and the enormous cauldrons are already on the fire. Squatting nearby, the men phlegmatically enjoy watching the women's labor. In general, Kyrgyz men do nothing; the weak and beautiful sex bears all the burdens and responsibilities of nomadic life"[36] Here, Moser paints a picture of

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[34]Moser and Ney, *Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki*, 362.

[35]Ibid., 363.

[36] Ibid., 309

Kazakh men as lazy and detached, while women bear the full weight of nomadic life. This portrayal stands in stark contrast to his depiction of Sart women, whom he characterizes as idle and purposeless. Yet, despite recognizing these vastly different roles, Moser arrives at the same overarching conclusion: Central Asian women, regardless of whether they are overburdened or unoccupied, are in need of liberation. This contradiction underscores the inherent bias in his narrative—women's oppression is predetermined in his eyes, not based on their lived realities but on a colonial framework that insists on their victimhood. Whether she labors tirelessly or remains confined to the home, the Central Asian woman is always in need of saving, reinforcing the European imperial gaze that frames her as an object of both pity and control.

Moser's representations of Central Asian women, whether as idle Sart wives or overworked Kazakh nomads, reflect the contradictions of the imperial gaze while ultimately reinforcing the same colonial conclusions. His fixation on their veiling, appearance, and labor—or lack thereof—demonstrates the European desire to see and possess, a key dynamic in Pratt's concept of the imperial gaze. The Sart woman's concealment frustrates him, while the Kazakh woman's visibility invites scrutiny, yet both are ultimately framed as oppressed and in need of European intervention. This reveals how colonial narratives impose meaning onto the Other, reducing women to objects of observation and denying them agency over their own representation. Admittedly, there are moments in Moser's accounts where women act with agency, but Moser himself fails to view these instances critically.[37] Ultimately, he reproduces the dominant narrative of the oppressed Central Asian woman.

[37]Ibid., 552.

Eugene Schuyler

Eugene Schuyler was an American diplomat in Russia in the second half of 19th century[38]. After receiving an invitation from General Kaufman, Schuyler departed St. Petersburg to travel to Turkestan in 1873, with his expedition lasting more than 8 months.[39] Even though he traveled as a diplomat, his gaze was that of the vanguard capitalist. He surveyed the land for potential industrialization, thinking of Turkestan as a place that needs to be developed for trade: "Its possession by Russia will not only develop the resources of the Syr-Darya, but will greatly stimulate trade".[40] Schuyler pays close attention to the various manufacturing present in Turkestan, commenting on the low quality of products and keeping in mind the ways of improving existing processes.[41]

About the Kazakh women he writes: "They spin, embroider - very well too - cook, and do most of the work, as the men are too lazy to do more than look after the horses."[42] Again, the same narrative of lazy Kazakh men and their wifes who shoulder all of the burden of nomadic life, and he reiterates the same thought almost with exact same thought only two pages later.[43] Here, Schuyler echoes a familiar trope of the idle nomadic man and the overburdened woman, a theme also found in Moser's accounts. Despite his attempts at nuance—such as his observation

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[38]Peter Bridges, "Eugene Schuyler, the only diplomatist," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16, no. 1 (March 9, 2005): 13–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290590916112., 14.

[39] Ibid., 16.

[40] Marion Moore Coleman, "Eugene Schuyler: Diplomat Extraordinary From the United States to Russia 1867-1876," *The Russian Review* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 1947): 33, https://doi.org/10.2307/125331, 36.

[41] Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja*, vol. 1 (Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), 189-194.

[42] Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja*, vol. 1 (Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), 189-194, 36.

[43] Ibid., 38.

that “it would be very difficult to describe any one face as showing the typical Kirghiz traits”—he ultimately falls into the same essentializing language, stating that Kazakhs are generally “short of stature, with round swarthy faces, insignificant noses, and small sharp black eyes, with the tightly-drawn eyelid which is seen in all the Mongol tribes.”[44] Although he was hesitant in generalizing Kazakh features, he more readily generalized Kazakh women, as in the same paragraph he writes: “In spite of its Turkish origin the Kirghiz race has almost as much of a Mongol as of a Turkish type. This is especially noticeable in the aristocratic class, above all in their women; and one reason is said to be that the Kirghiz, until recent times, preferred, whenever possible, to marry Kalmuk women.”[45] This description reflects an assumed authority over the indigenous population, granting Schuyler the confidence to not only define a "typical" Kazakh type but also to speculate on the origins of their features.

Schuyler also describes that Sart men treat their women as objects: “The position of a wife who is regarded by her husband merely as an instrument of his pleasures, or as an obedient servant to manage his house, cannot be a very pleasant one, liable as she is at any time to be divorced at his fancy or his desire to replace her by another.”[46] Here, the Sart woman is reduced to “an instrument” of pleasure, where she has no role outside of her service to her husband. Interestingly, Schuyler frames divorces as yet another way the Uzbek women are oppressed. Divorces were legal in the USA during his lifetime, yet he specifically chooses the rhetoric of the oppressed woman when it comes to divorces in Central Asia. While Moser mentions that divorces are common, he also fails to comment on how women may have enjoyed more control

[44] Ibid., 35.

[45] Ibid., 34.

[46] Ibid., 146.

over their lives because of the legality of divorces[47]. Both Moser and Schuyler do not recognize Uzbek women's agency.

Schuyler's preoccupation with Sart women's oppression extends beyond marriage to their clothing and visibility in public spaces. He finds their outer attire displeasing, calling it a dull and "most ugly and unseemly costume that could be imagined."[48] His discomfort with the veil is part of a broader colonial narrative that equates unveiling with progress and civilization. Schuyler is able to observe the unveiled Sart and "get some idea of the female type" from observing prostitutes.[49] The unveiling of the prostitutes is framed in a liberating key, as a choice the women make to escape their husbands.[50] Schuyler notes with concern that the unveiling of the prostitutes reinforced the veiling of other women, not just among Sart women, but also among the Tatar and Jewish women, as they did not want to be associated with prostitutes. Like other observers of his time, Schuyler is keen on seeing women's faces and attributes their continued veiling to what he perceives as the local population's insufficient enlightenment.[51] In his view, the veil becomes a relic of the past, symbolizing an "uncivilized" society. He is saddened that this movement toward unveiling began with prostitutes rather than with "respectable" women, as he believes this association only strengthened societal resistance to the civilizing change.

Schuyler's writings reinforce the familiar imperial narrative of the oppressed Eastern woman, framing Russia's intervention in Turkestan as a civilizing necessity. His portrayal of the veiled Sart woman as a figure of subjugation serves to justify colonial rule, positioning Russian

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[47]Moser and Ney*, Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki,* 366.

[48] Schuyler, *Turkistan*, vol. 1., 124.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

expansion as a means of liberating women from what he perceives as the constraints of their own culture. Yet, even as he insists on the Sart woman's oppression, his gaze remains possessive—he desires to see and possess, lamenting the veil as an obstacle to his ability to categorize and define. This imperial gaze, as Pratt describes, situates the Western observer as both superior and enlightened, granting him the authority to diagnose and remedy the supposed failings of the colonized society. At the same time, Schuyler marginalizes women's experiences within his broader narrative, which is primarily concerned with Turkestan's industrial potential. His preoccupation with trade, manufacturing, and modernization reduces discussions of women to the periphery, constructing the double subaltern image Spivak describes. The Sart woman is both a silent object and a rhetorical device—invoked to highlight the region's supposed backwardness but ultimately excluded from any meaningful agency within his account.

George Gins, Orest Skapskii, and other Russian Travelers and Ethnographers

Of course, Russian ethnographers, scholars and political actors had their own motivation for pushing the narrative of the enslaved Central Asian women. In 1913 George Gins, when surveying the Semirechye lands for possible settler relocations, described the dynamic between the Kazakh men and women the following way: "The lazy Kyrgyz sat idly in the yurt, and equally idle neighbors came from elsewhere just to watch us. Only the women were bustling around the yurts. They are true slaves."[52] He describes the men as lazy, who do nothing and spend their time sitting near the yurts, while the women were the only ones doing anything around the aul. It is almost comical how repetitive and similar this description of the Kazakh is from one traveler to another. He finishes the quote by calling the women true slaves. As a

[52] Grigorii K. Gins, *V kirgizskikh aulakh [In the Kyrgyz Villages]* (1913), accessed November 13, 2024, http://az.lib.ru/g/gins_g_k/text_1913_v_kirgizskih_aulah.shtml, chap. 1. My translation.

colonial representative, Gins was using the narrative of the poor oppressed women as advantageous to further the colonial settler movement.

Orest Shkapskii, a clerical officer in Semirechye, expanded this discourse in his 1896 pamphlet "O polozhenii zhenshchin u kochevnikov Srednei Azii" [The Position of Women Among the Nomads of Central Asia]. He wrote, "The situation of native women—both Kyrgyz and Sart—is deeply unfortunate. Both, in the face of customary law, are entirely impersonal beings, without rights, partly slaves, partly simply objects with a certain value."[53] Here he is concerned both for Kazakh and Sart women, accusing the folk customs of reducing them to impersonal half slaves half objections, who have no rights. The folk customs he is referring to is the *adat* among the nomadic populations and *shariat* among the sedentary populations. Shkapskii was frustrated that the *bii's* and *kazi* still had administrative authority, and argued that this practice should be abolished, underscoring his belief that only Russian imperial law could truly liberate Central Asian women. In this way, Shkapskii instrumentalized the narrative of female oppression to argue for greater Russian legal control over the colony.

Pereshivalov, horrified by Shkapskii's conclusion, writes a response in the periodical *Russkii Turkestan*, titled "Rokovoe nedorazumenie" [Fatal Misunderstanding]. In the introduction to his piece he writes the following:

> But what would the reader say if, somewhere within the borders of Russia, there were found an entire group—thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people—who, despite bearing all the external and spiritual features and signs of being made in the image and likeness of God, nevertheless remain in slavery? Who are bought and sold by name, used to pay off debts and penalties, given as alms by servants of God, inherited like property,

[53]Orest Shkapskii, "Polozhenie zhenshchin u kochevnikov Srednei Azii,"[The Position of Women Among the Nomads of Central Asia] in *Turkestanskie sborniki*, vol. 521 (1896), 53. My translation.

> and from birth to death constitute someone's personal possession, protected by courts and authorities just like movable and immovable property? I believe that any reader would be shaken by such a revelation and would agree with me that only some fatal misunderstanding could have allowed these people to remain in slavery until now.[54]

Pereshivalov is describing the widely imagined image of the Central Asian woman, depicting the Kazakh women as slaves in their own homes. Yet Pereshivalov argues that it is not the fault of Russian law, as it prohibits enslavement. It is simply a misunderstanding that could be corrected if the Kazakhs are informed that what they are doing is illegal. He writes that the first colonial administrators must have thought that *kalim* was a means of transferring property from one family to another through marriage. He agrees with Shkapskii that Central Asian women can no longer be slaves, yet he is not against keeping the practice of *kalim* as a tradition. He states that it should remain as part of transferring property between families. It is ironic, how his "reimagining" of the *kalim* practice comes close to how it was actually practiced, yet he remains committed to the colonial fiction of women as victims in need of Russian guidance.

The theme of unveiling as liberation also emerges repeatedly in Russian colonial discourse. In the periodical *Niva*, a man named Stremoykhov published a series of travelog sketches titled "V srednei Azii: iz zapisok russkogo puteshestvennika" *[In Central Asia: From the Notes of a Russian Traveler].* He writes about his encounter in Tashkent with a Tajik merchant named Khamut-Khoja. Khamut-Khoja has two wives and Stremoukhov asks whether his wives are veiled, like all of the other women, to which Khamut-Khoja replies positively. The traveler continues the dialogue by trying to convince the merchant to let his wives unveil:

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[54] S. Pereshivalov, "Rokovoe nedorazumenie" [Fatal Misunderstanding], *Gazeta Russkii Turkestan*, 1898, no. 20. My translation.

> "…It seems you've become quite familiar with Russian customs—you've seen the kind of freedom Russian women enjoy; you should follow their example. You yourself praise our ways… Then let your wives go about with uncovered faces, don't keep them locked up—others will follow your lead, and you'll see what a good life you'll all begin to have."
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> "No, no! That's impossible!" Khamut replied animatedly. "All our people would mock me. Muhammad clearly said: a woman was created solely to obey her husband in everything, to be his faithful slave. And he wasn't mistaken: give them freedom, and you'll regret it. Your women are clever—they were made differently; they won't yield to any man—any one of them could be a kushbegi. But ours are like dolls, they understand nothing; they're good only while they're locked up. Let them be free—and they'll destroy the whole human race; they certainly will."[55]

This staged dialogue is strikingly similar to one found in Moser's writings, reinforcing the trope of the Eastern man as a patriarchal oppressor unwilling to grant women their freedom.[56] What remains absent, of course, is the voice of Central Asian women themselves. The traveler constructs the Sart woman as the silent object of discussion, while men debate her status and the potential for her "liberation."

The framing of prostitution as liberation for the Sart woman can also be found in Nalivkins' book, *A Sketch of the Everyday Life of Women of the Sedentary native Population of the Fergana Valley*. This sketch was written jointly by Vladimir Nalivkin and his wife Maria Nalivkina, where they focus specifically on the daily lives of Sart women. Nalivkin's talk about prostitution extensively, and the last chapter of their book, titled "Prostitution," ends abruptly in

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[55]N. Stremoukhov, *"В средней Азии: из записок русского путешественника" [In Central Asia: From the Notes of a Russian Traveler]*, *Нива* 10, no. 24 (1879): 462–463, Электронная библиотека Руниверс, https://runivers.ru/lib/book9158/480317/, 463. My translation.

[56]Moser and Ney, *Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki* , 366.

the middle of a narrative about attending parties with prostitutes. Kamp speculates that this section of the book is most likely a reflection of Vladimir's experiences rather than Maria's.[57] In this section prostitution is presented as a way of gaining freedom:

> One of the first acts of the first local prostitute was that she immediately started walking along the streets with an open face. This was something between spitting in the face of the old society that oppressed her and a sort of a "Marseillaise" she sang on the ruins of the regime that recently threatened to stone her. It was a sort of glee of freedom, a greeting to those who forgave her in advance, gave her the right of citizenship,and removed her eternal fear for her life.[58]

This first prostitute is presented as if she had been waiting all along for this opportunity to throw off her veil. Prostitution is framed as a chance for the indigenous woman to "spit in the face of the old society that oppressed her." This perspective remains deeply rooted in colonial assumptions, presenting colonial interventions as vehicles for emancipation while ignoring the influence of colonial systems of exploitation.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that representations of Central Asian women in colonial narratives were one-dimensional, with travelers, ethnographers, and administrators repeating the same stereotypes of oppression and victimhood. Whether describing Sart women as idle and confined or Kazakh women as overworked, these accounts simplified complex lives into narrow tropes that served colonial goals. Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "imperial gaze" helps explain

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[57] Kamp, "Editors Introdction," in Nalivkin, V. P., and M. V. Nalivkina. *Muslim Women of the Fergana Valley : a 19th-Century Ethnography from Central Asia*. Edited by Marianne Kamp. Translated by Mariana Markova and Marianne Kamp. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016, 10.

[58] Nalivkin and Nalivkina, *Muslim Women of the Fergana Valley,* 186. Cited from the English translation published in Kamp's edited volume. Where possible, I cross-checked against the original Russian edition, but page references here and onward correspond to Kamp's translation.

how this worked: European, American and Russian observers turned Central Asian women into objects to be studied and controlled, viewing them through a lens of moral superiority and the so-called civilizing mission. By focusing on practices like veiling or *kalim*, these writers created an image of the "oppressed Eastern woman" that justified colonial intervention while ignoring the voices and agency of the women themselves. In this way, colonial narratives didn't just silence Central Asian women—they reinforced the same kind of control they claimed to criticize.

By portraying Central Asian women as passive victims in need of saving, these writers ended up doing the same thing they accused indigenous patriarchy of doing. This aligns with Gayatri Spivak's argument that colonized women were made doubly subaltern—oppressed first by their own societies and then by colonial narratives that spoke for them while denying their agency. Pratt's concept of the "anti-conquest" further shows how colonial observers pretended to be benevolent while actually asserting their dominance. The repetitive nature of these narratives, seen in the works of Schuyler, Moser, and Russian ethnographers, reveals how colonial discourse built its authority by recycling the same stereotypes. Because many of these writers did not know the local languages but still needed content, they often borrowed from each other, reproducing secondhand stories that further distanced their accounts from the lived realities of Central Asian women. In the end, these accounts tell us more about the colonial mindset than about the lives of Central Asian women. By silencing women and reducing them to symbols of backwardness, colonial narratives not only justified empire but also perpetuated the very oppression they claimed to fight against.

Chapter 2

Imitating Men:

The Women Naturalists, the Adventuresses and Capitalist Vanguardesses

Introduction

Building on the previous chapters, which examined the literary conventions of male travelers, this chapter explores how other women travelers in late 19th and early 20th century Russian Turkestan complied with and reinforced dominant male discourses. I have identified three narrative tropes that are often mixed within women travel writing that comply with, rather than subvert the dominant discourse: the women naturalists, adventuresses and capital vanguardesses. Drawing on Elaine Showalter's concept of the "Feminine" phase of literary development,[59] this chapter demonstrates how imitation served as a strategy for gaining acceptance, while Mary Louise Pratt's framework of naturalist and capital vanguard narratives provides insight into the imperial discourses these women adopted.[60] Additionally, the concept of the "adventuress" offers a lens for understanding how some women travelers navigated the tension between compliance with dominant discourse and self-assertion. The women discussed in this chapter sought legitimacy within a male-dominated literary and scientific sphere. This was done by imitating the authoritative, detached tone of male travelers and adopting the goal-driven rhetoric of imperial expansion. However, their focus on imitating male conventions often led to the marginalization of indigenous women, who were either ignored or reduced to stereotypical portrayals. By prioritizing their own authority and aligning with imperial discourses, these

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[59] Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," *História Cultural*, accessed November 11, 2024, https://historiacultural.mpbnet.com.br/feminismo/Toward_a_Feminist_Poetics.htm.

[60] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes,* 1992

women travelers reinforced the same colonial and patriarchal frameworks that defined male-authored travel writing, ultimately contributing to the erasure of indigenous women's voices and experiences.

Theoretical Discussion

Women, especially in Russia, were not not as prolific as men in authoring literary works due to societal conventions. Yet women still managed to write, choosing "minor" genres, other than the novel. A popular"minor" genre that women chose was autobiography, and Zirin notes that the most popular subgenres of autobiography in the 19th century were the subjective travel journal and the military memoir.[61] Marsh suggests that this tendency may be attributed to women trying to evade criticism, but she also recognizes that it could stem from Russian women inheriting a problematic prose tradition, in which women were represented in limited ways, such as either the Angel in the House or the Demonic Woman.[62] In Western literary tradition, the analogue would be the angelic woman and the madwoman in the attic.[63] Female authors faced societal pressures that made them internalize these roles. They were expected to write "proper" literature that upheld moral virtues while also struggling against the restrictions placed on their voices. Thus, choosing a genre like travel literature may have given women more freedom to move away from these dichotomies.

In their quest to gain legitimacy as authors, women often wrote in the same tone and style as men. The stylistic choice of travel narratives written by women in the late 19th and early 20th

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[61]Mary Fleming Zirin, "Nadezhda Durova, Russia's 'Cavalry Maiden,'" in Nadezhda Durova, *The Cavalry Maiden* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), xii-xiii.

[62] Ibid., 12.

[63] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).

century can be explained through examining Elaine Showalter's characterization of the development of women's literary tradition. Showaleter outlines three stages in the development of women's literature: Feminine, Feminist and Female. The first phase, roughly dated from the 1840's to the 1880's, is described as "an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture," during which women "internalized its assumptions about female nature."[64] The second stage is characterized by the dramatization of the struggles of womanhood that is found in literature written from the 1880's to the 1920's. The final phase, ongoing since the 1920's, is described as a rejection of "both imitation and protest - two forms of dependency," where women choose to turn to "female experience as the source of an autonomous art."[65]

The travel narratives of women in this period reflect the characteristics of Showalter's Feminine stage. Just as women novelists internalized male literary standards, women travelers adopted narrative strategies that mirrored the authoritative, empirical voice of male explorers. Showalter notes that many women writers took on male pseudonyms and conformed to established literary conventions, shaping their narrative tone, diction, structure, and characterization. This tendency is particularly evident in travel writing, where women sought legitimacy by employing the same detached, scientific style as their male counterparts. However, in this context, these conventions were not just literary but also epistemological, tied to scientific knowledge production and imperial discourse. Mary Louise Pratt's analysis of naturalist travel narratives provides a crucial framework for understanding how these conventions functioned—and how women travelers engaged with them.

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[64] Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," *História Cultural*, accessed November 11, 2024, https://historiacultural.mpbnet.com.br/feminismo/Toward_a_Feminist_Poetics.htm.

[65] Ibid.

Naturalist travel narratives were shaped by the cumulative, observational enterprise of documenting geography, flora, and fauna.[66] Pratt highlights how these narratives also constructed colonial subjects as passive, interchangeable figures, existing only on the margins of the text. Indigenous people, such as the Khoikhoi in Sparrman and Paterson's accounts, appear merely as nameless laborers—fetching water, carrying baggage, or guiding expeditions—without individual identity or voice.[67] Their presence is assumed but rarely acknowledged beyond their utility to the traveling party. Even when referenced, they are reduced to generic labels like "a/the/my Hottentot" and are almost never quoted or given direct speech.[68] Instead, indigenous groups are confined to a separate textual space, objectified through formal ethnographic descriptions rather than engaged as active participants in the narrative.[69] These ethnographic descriptions encompassed the description of appearance, such as body parts and ornaments, but they did not move beyond that. Similar detached descriptions of Sart and Kazakh men and women can be found in travel narratives of men in Central Asia.

While naturalist travelers framed their journeys around the cumulative, observational enterprise of documenting geography, flora, and fauna, capital vanguards approached travel through a different lens. Pratt identifies the capital vanguard as a distinct narrative trope in 19th-century travel literature, one that abandoned the contemplative, aestheticizing rhetoric of discovery in favor of a "goal-oriented rhetoric of conquest and achievement."[70]. Unlike naturalists, who sought to catalog the natural world as part of a cosmic order, capital vanguards

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[66] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes,* 1992, 50.

[67] Ibid., 51

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 145.

viewed the colonies primarily as landscapes of potential profit and European expansion. As Pratt explains, "Unlike explorers and naturalists, these travelers of the 1820s did not write up realities they took for new; they did not present themselves as discoverers of a primal world; the bits of nature they collected were samples of raw materials, not pieces of Nature's cosmic design."[71]

Rather than marveling at an unknown environment, capital vanguards depicted the land and its inhabitants as resources to be exploited, obstacles to be overcome, or inefficiencies to be rectified. In their writings, success was measured not by knowledge gained or cultural exchange but by their ability to push forward through logistical and environmental difficulties. "In many accounts, the itinerary itself becomes the occasion for a narrative of success, in which travel is a triumph in its own right. What are conquered are destinations, not kingdoms; what are overcome are not military challenges, but logistical ones."[72] These travelers portrayed themselves as embattled figures struggling against what they perceived as an unproductive and idle society—fighting against delays, bad weather, uncooperative locals, and poor infrastructure. While Pratt fits this narrative trope to the 1820's, it is because during this period European expatriate communities in South America started to form. In the context of Russian Turkestan, this period shifts to the late 19th century, after the establishment of the colony and Stolypin's reforms for Russian peasant migrations.

The travel narratives of women in this period largely conformed to the literary and epistemological conventions established by men. As discussed, naturalist travelers positioned themselves as detached observers, documenting landscapes and peoples through an empirical, classificatory lens, while capital vanguards framed their journeys as struggles against

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

inefficiency and obstacles to European expansion. Women travelers, seeking legitimacy in a male-dominated literary sphere, often imitated these narrative strategies, adopting the authoritative tone of the naturalist or the goal-driven rhetoric of the capital vanguard. This imitation aligns with what Elaine Showalter identifies as the Feminine phase of literary development, in which women writers sought acceptance by adhering to male literary conventions rather than challenging them. The strategies they employed can be categorized as the naturalist, the capital vanguardess, and the adventuress. Often, narratives can be a mix of two or all three, with the former two being adaptations of Pratt's concepts, while the last concept is my own contribution, developed to capture a distinct mode of engagement that is, to my knowledge, absent in existing frameworks.

The women travelers in Russian Turkestan that took on the narrative style of naturalists maintained a scientific objective tone, and wrote down their observations about local geography, climate, and architecture. Elements of naturalist narratives can be found in the works of Anna Rossikova, and Iulia Golovnina. The capital vanguardess, like their male counterparts, emphasized conquest of destinations, such as the various cities and towns of Russian Turkestan, and the overcoming of logistical hurdles. However, less attention is given to industrial and commercial opportunities in the narratives of women. The tone of the capital vanguardess is also objective and detached. In this regard, all of the women examined in this chapter exhibit elements of this narrative style. The adventuress narrative style can be attributed to Golovnina and Lucy Atkinson.

In their goal of imitating men and establishing themselves within the literary traditions of men, these women often reproduced the same stereotypical statements about indigenous people. Despite having access to the indigenous women, these travelers rarely made use of it. Most of the

time this is because the description of indigenous women and their daily life remained outside of their scope of interest and did not match the detached scientific style of writing that these women tried to imitate. Thus, indigenous people, especially women, were left on the periphery of their narratives, allotted only brief paragraphs of descriptions that reproduced the same stereotypes that dominated male travel narratives. Sart women are presented as idle and passive, Kazakh women are presented as overworked.

However, the narrative tropes that will be discussed are not fixed categories, but rather a spectrum, thus in some cases there is more nuance in the representation of indigenous women. Golovnina, for example, explains that the "bride price" is used to purchase all of the necessary things for her future household, offering a more complex understanding of *kalim* than the common narrative.[73] The fluid nature of these categories is best exemplified in the narratives of Atkinson, who will also be discussed in the next chapter. She falls between the narratives of adventuress and *exploratrices sociales*. In this chapter I will explore how her narratives fit the adventuress narrative trope, as well as the colonial narratives about Kazakh women that she reproduced in her book. In the following chapter I will explore how her narratives are valuable beyond the reproduction of colonial narratives.

Anna Yefimovna Rossikova

Anna Rossikova was a late 19th century Russian traveler, who explored the Chechen mountains and Russian Turkestan. In 1882 Rossikova was among the first women to graduate from the four year Bestuzhev courses for women in St. Petersburg, majoring in history and

[73]Iullia Golovnina, *Na Pamirakh: zapiski russkoi puteshestvennitsy* [*On the Pamirs: Notes of a Russian Traveler*] (Moscow, 1902), chap. 5.

philology. After finishing the courses, Rossikova taught privately in Vladikavkaz.[74] She was a member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in the Caucasus region, and participated in the VIII Congress of Russian Naturalists and Doctors in St. Petersburg (section "Geography, Ethnography and Anthropology").[75] In 1891, she was a member of the Committee of National Readings, which functioned in Vladikavkaz. She published at least ten works among various periodicals, including *Russkie Vestnik*, *Nauchnoe Obozrenie* and *Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*.[76] In the summer of 1898 she traveled to Central Asia, along the Amu-Darya river from Chardzhuy to Nukus.[77] She detailed her travels in Central Asia in several literary works, most of which were published in *Nauchnoe Obozrenie* as scientific works.[78]

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[74]A. A. Golovlyov, "Pervaia zhenshchina-issledovatel' Gornoi Chechni (Pamiati Anny Efimovny Rossikovoi)" [The First Female Researcher of the Mountainous Chechnya (In Memory of Anna Efimovna Rossikova)], Samarskaia Luka: problemy regional'noi i global'noi ekologiia 29, no. 4 (2020), 165.

[75] Ibid., 164.

[76] For other works by A. E. Rossikova, see Rossikova, "V gorakh i ushchel'akh Kurtatii i istochkov reki Tereka" ["In the Mountains and Gorges of Kurtatia and the Sources of the Terek River"], Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva 16 (1894): 301–356; "Puteshestvie po tsentral'noi chasti Gornoy Chechni" ["Journey Through the Central Part of Mountainous Chechnya"], Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva 18 (1896): 139–228; "Belyi tur (Osetinskaya legenda)" ["The White Tour (Ossetian Legend)"], Kavkazskii vestnik 5 (1900): 25–43; "Kalmytskaya step' (Pisma s dorogi). Pismo pervoe" ["The Kalmyk Steppe (Letters from the Road). Letter One"], Nauchnoye obozreniye 1 (1901): 42–47; "Pis'ma s dorogi. II. V lesakh Ufimskoj gubernii" ["Letters from the Road. II. In the Forests of the Ufa Province"], Nauchnoye obozreniye 6 (1901): 59–67; "U osetin" ["Among the Ossetians"], in Aziatskaya Rossiya. Illiustrirovannyi geograficheskii sbornik [Asian Russia. Illustrated Geographical Collection], edited by A. Kruber, S. Grigoriev, A. Barkov, and S. Chefranov (Moscow: Izdanie T-va I.N. Kushneriev i Kº, 1903), 43–50.

[77]Golovlyov, "Pervaia zhenshchina-issledovatel' Gornoi Chechni" [The First Woman Researcher of the Mountainous Chechnya], 173.

[78]For other works by Rossikova on related topics in Russian Turkestan, see Anna E. Rossikova, "Sredi pustyni po velikoi Sredne-Aziatskoi reke Amu-Darye (iz puteshestviya letom 1898 g. v Russkii Turkestan). Chast' pervaia. Ot Chardzhuiia do Petro-Aleksandrovska" ["In the Desert along the Great Central Asian River Amu-Darya (From a Journey to Russian Turkestan in the Summer of 1898). Part One. From Chardzhou to Petro-Aleksandrovsk"], Nauchnoye obozreniye, no. 10 (1899): 1779–1806; "Kalmytskaya step' (Pisma s dorogi). Pismo pervoe" ["The Kalmyk Steppe (Letters from the Road). Letter One"], Nauchnoye obozreniye, no. 1 (1901): 42–47.

In 1902 Rossikova published her Russian Turkestan travel narrative in *Russkii Vestnik* in two parts, titled "Po Amu-Darii ot Petro-Aleksandrovska do Nukusa" [Along the Amu Darya from Petro-Aleksandrovsk to Nukus]. The first part of the publication reads like a survey of the region and its people, with an objective and detached tone. The narrative style of this part is closest to that of the naturalist, where Rossikova describes the climate, people and region. The second part's narrative is written as the capitalist vanguardess, detailing the various challenges and hardships of traveling along the Amu-Darya. Rossikova begins her narrative with a geographical and demographic outline of Petro-Aleksandrovsk, detailing the absence of infrastructure, the total area of Amu-Darya region and the people that inhabit it.[79] A scientific tone is carried out throughout this publication, often giving the reader various "facts" about the region and its aboriginal population. Like the various male travelers, Rossikova discusses agricultural practices of the locals, which also calls back to the capitalist vanguard narrative tropes.[80]

Although Rossikova states to the reader that she was able to gain access to the "mysterious sphere of the aboriginal life and make various observations [on Uzbek women]," her description of the local people does not go beyond surface level stereotypes.[81] Rossikova describes Uzbek women the following way:

> If the Asian native in general is an element significantly lagging behind universal human culture, then the Uzbek woman represents, in this regard, a phenomenal type of complete spiritual immobility and stagnation. The entire cycle of her thoughts and desires is limited

[79]Anna E. Rossikova, "Po Amu-Darye ot Petro-Aleksandrovska do Nukusa" ["Along the Amu-Darya from Petro-Aleksandrovsk to Nukus"], Russkii vestnik 281, no. 8 (1902), 562.

[80] Ibid., 571, 573.

[81] Ibid., 574.

> to marriage and childbirth. It is difficult to imagine a woman more passive, faceless, and helpless—deprived of all human rights and dignity—than an Uzbek or Sarty woman from a wealthy or even merely well-off family. A semi-conscious existence, inequality, and the absence of any kind of standards reconcile her to the position of the first, second, third, and sometimes even fourth wife under one roof, behind the high walls of a shared *saklya* (clay house).[82]

In many ways, this description of Sart and Uzbek women is similar to how male travelers described them.[83] This passage emphasizes Uzbek women's supposed passivity, lack of agency, and subjugation within a patriarchal system. Rossikova characterizes them as culturally and spiritually stagnant, describing the Uzbek woman as a "phenomenal type of complete spiritual immobility and stagnation." Her aspirations are said to revolve solely around marriage and childbirth, reinforcing the stereotype of non-European women as lacking individuality and ambition and turning her into an agentless object. Furthermore, the text dehumanizes these women by depicting them as "the most inactive, faceless, and helpless members of society, stripped of any human rights or dignity." Rossikova uses polygyny to further reinforce the image of Central Asian society as oppressive and archaic.

Rossikova's depiction of Kazakh women also aligns with male travel narratives, emphasizing how they are overworked and are treated as commodities. Although Rossikova states, that Kazakh women in some sense have more freedom (by which she means that Kazakh women did not wear the veil) than Uzbek women due to their nomadic lifestyle, she states that Kazakh women are nonetheless "faceless and disenfranchised, like all women of the East."[84]

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[82] Ibid. All translations of Rossikova are my own.

[83] This is very similar to Moser's description that I have discussed in chapter 1, Moser and Ney, *Frankoiazychnye putevye ocherki*, 366.

[84]Rossikova, "Po Amu-Darye" [Along the Amu-Darya], 583.

Rossikova leans into the "overworked Kazakh woman and her lazy husband" stereotype, that is perpetuated so much among the various travelers of Central Asia.[85] She writes that women do all of the domestic labor and chores while the men are always slacking off, spending their time strolling about in neighboring auls or bazaars, collecting news or hunting.[86] Like her male colleagues, she also finds the practice of *kalim* outrageous, likening it to human trafficking and slavery. She states that a Kazakh woman is a commodity, bought and sold as draft animals. The practice of *amanger*, the practice of levirate marriage, is also criticized for treating women like slaves.[87]

Rossikova's descriptions of Central Asian women mirror the male-authored travel narratives of her time, both in content and tone. By employing a scientific voice, she aligns herself with the ethnographic and geographical discourse used by male explorers, lending her observations an air of objectivity and authority. However, rather than offering new insights or challenging prevailing stereotypes, she reinforces the same colonial and patriarchal tropes that male travelers frequently employed. Her depiction of Uzbek and Sart women as passive, faceless, and oppressed mirrors the rhetoric of Russian imperial expansion, which framed Central Asian societies as backward and in need of intervention. Similarly, her portrayal of Kazakh women as overworked and treated as commodities perpetuates the same stereotypes as in the narratives of her male colleagues. By reproducing these narratives, as well as maintaining an objective detached tone of the naturalists and capital vanguards, Rossikova demonstrates an example of how women travelers often chose to imitate men in their writing.

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[85] Akin to Schuyler's description, Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja*, vol. 1 (Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), 36.

[86]Rossikova, "Po Amu-Darye" [Along the Amu-Darya], 583.

[87] Ibid., 584.

Iulia Golovnina

Iuliia Golovnina participated in an expedition to the Pamir Mountains through Russian Turkestan in 1898. She traveled with a large group that included her husband, Dmitry Golovnin, as well as Nadezhda Petrovna Barteneva, a female photographer whose photographs illustrated Golovnina's travel account. Starting from Tiflis, their journey passed through Baku and crossed the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk, then continued through the deserts to Samarkand and Tashkent before reaching Kokand, Andijan, and Osh, then traveling through the Alay Valley to the Pamirs, visiting lakes Kara-Kul and Rang-Kul, before following the Murgab River and eventually retracing the path back through the Alay Valley and Daraut-Kurghan. She describes her journey in her book, *Na Pamirakh: Zapiski russkoi puteshestvennitsy* [*On the Pamirs: Notes of a Russian Traveler*], published in Moscow in 1902. Golovnina referred to her journey as an "expedition," where they collected specimens for the Moscow University Zoological Museum, emphasizing the scientific nature of the expedition.

Her book is divided into two parts, the first part is written as a mix between the capitalist vanguardess and the adventuress, where she describes the places they visited along with the logistical hardships of their travel in the desert regions of Russian Turkestan. Golovnina often emphasizes her experience as a woman traveler, presenting herself as a strong woman who is able to travel on equal footing with men, marking the elements of *the adventuress* narrative trope. This is seen through the themes of abandoning femininity, and putting on a more masculine role. For example, she describes how they were traveling in cherkeska, a male dress of the people of Caucasus, and how "all coquettishness must be postponed until a more convenient

occasion."[88] Later, when she and her friend had to dress back into European female dresses, she expressed her discomfort with the dress.[89] Her anxiety about being seen as a nuisance due to her gender is evident when she acknowledges that traveling with women can cause delays. However, she reassures the reader that on this trip, none of the delays were caused by the ladies.[90] Overall, Golovnina's narrative is focused on her personal experiences, highlighting the ways she navigates societal expectations of femininity while asserting her competence as a traveler. Through her descriptions of adopting masculine attire and minimizing the inconveniences traditionally associated with women travelers, she constructs an image of herself as both adaptable and resilient, challenging the limitations placed on women in exploration.

In the second half of the book, Golovnina's travel narrative takes on a more scientific tone, shifting from personal observations to a detailed examination of the region. She provides a geographical overview of the Pamirs, outlining their location and political significance within the broader Central Asian context. Her account includes a discussion of past explorations of the Pamirs, as well as an analysis of the orography and topography of the mountainous terrain. She also examines the climate of the region, supplemented by a meteorological chart from her 1898 expedition. Golovnina dedicates another section to the flora, fauna, and population of the Pamirs, where in the population section she states in one paragraph that the local population is mostly the Kirghiz who are prone to various diseases. The final two chapters are dedicated to the description of their scientific equipment and a list of relevant literature on the Pamirs. Thus, in the second section of her book Golovnina takes an obvious naturalist narrative style.

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[88]Iulliia Golovnina, *Na Pamirakh: Zapiski russkoi puteshestvennitsy* [*On the Pamirs: Notes of a Russian Traveler*] (Moscow, 1902), 68.

[89] Ibid., 192.

[90] Ibid., 60.

Thus, the scope of her narrative leaves little room for ethnographic observations. She does not give extensive details about the local people. The only time she mentions the Sart women was during their short stop in Tashkent. She briefly touches on the local woman, stating the following:

> Among the Sarts, as with most Muslims, the woman plays a modest role: her almost exclusive duty is to bear children—she is not even considered part of the labor force, as the burden of work both inside and outside the home, as well as the care of livestock, falls on the man. The woman is limited to sewing, embroidery, and kitchen duties—though sometimes even the latter is carried out by the husband.[91]

This passage echoes the discourse common in travel writing authored by men, where the Sart woman is often portrayed as oppressed, secluded, and inactive. The generalized tone of the passage, which lacks nuance or acknowledgment of individual experiences, further reinforces its ethnographic authority, making it appear as an objective observation. In this passage, echoing the dominant narrative set by men, the Sart woman is transformed into an idle object without agency yet again.

Golovnina also discusses the unveiling of Sart women, stating that it is necessary to change the position of Sart women. Unveiling, she states, is the first step to doing so. She notes that the population is resisting the unveiling, and describes a story where the local administration tried to persuade the local men to let their wives unveil. In order to do so, they hosted a ball for the indigenous aristocracy, with the condition that all wives and daughters must not cover their faces. The ball took place with unveiled women, but it turned out that all of the women that attended the ball were prostitutes. According to Golovnina, when this was found out, all the gifts

[91] Ibid., 16. All translations from Golovnina's work are my own.

were confiscated and no further action to unveil Sart women were taken.[92] It is interesting that she does not describe why the position of Sart women needs to change and how, only that it must and the way to do it is through unveiling. She later adds that unveiling of Sart women would also be useful because criminals tend to hide under the veils. She highlights that "развитые из сартов сознают ненормальность такого замкнутого положения женщины," but hesitate to let their wives take off the veil due to cultural norms.[93] It is implied in this statement that those Sarts who do not agree with the unveiling are undeveloped or uncultured.

In later chapters, Golovnina also touches upon Kazakh women. Here the same narrative that was popular among the men is repeated over:

> In his own family, the Kyrgyz man is almost useless: his duties are limited to cutting grass for the livestock for winter—and even this simple task is usually carried out by teenage boys. All the labor falls on the woman's shoulders: she looks after the animals, milks them, cleans and feeds them, makes kumis, weaves carpets and fabrics from camel wool, saddles horses—in short, she is everything in the household.[94]

The men are lazy, doing almost nothing in maintaining their nomadic life, except rarely cutting grass for the winter for the livestock. The Kazakh woman bears all of the workload around the household. However, she does not compare the Kazakh woman to a slave. She does not demonize the practice of *kalim*, recognizing that most of it goes into funding the future household of the bride. She states that Kazakh women enjoy significant authority within the household and are free to divorce and remarry as many times as they wish.[95] It is unclear where she got this information and why her opinions on *kalim* differ from the dominant narratives.

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[92] Ibid., ch 2.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

Perhaps from observing the Kazakhs that were in the process of migrating to their summer camp that they saw during their journey towards the Pamirs.[96]

Golovnina's primary concern lies in documenting her personal experiences as a woman traveler and asserting her place within the traditionally male sphere of scientific exploration. Her book, *Na Pamirakh: Zapiski russkoy puteshestvennitsy*, reflects this dual focus, with the first part detailing her travels and the second adopting a scientific tone, discussing the geography, climate, and population of the Pamirs. While she emphasizes her resilience and ability to endure hardships alongside men, adopting masculine dress and minimizing traditional feminine traits, her ethnographic observations remain limited and largely reflect dominant stereotypes. She portrays Sart women as passive and secluded, presenting unveiling as a necessary step for their advancement without elaborating on why or how their position should change. Her depiction of Kazakh women aligns with existing narratives that highlight their labor contributions while acknowledging their relative autonomy within the household. Ultimately, Golovnina does not engage deeply with the lives of local people, instead reinforcing familiar tropes that align with male-authored travel accounts, likely to assert her credibility within the scientific community and meet the expectations of her readership.

Olga Petrovna Lobry

Little is known about Olga Lobry beyond the fact that she was a poet and a contributor to *Russkii Vestnik*, as mentioned in *Istoriia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii v dnevnikakh i vospominaniiakh [The History of Pre-Revolutionary Russia in Diaries and Memoirs]*.[97] In the

[96] Ibid., chapter 5

[97] *Istoriia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii v dnevnikakh i vospominaniiakh [The History of Pre-Revolutionary Russia in Diaries and Memoirs]*, ed. P. A. Zaionchkovskii (Moscow: Kniga, 1976–1989), 3:1, no. 609; 4:1, no. 562.

articles she published in *Russkii Vestnik*, titled "Ot Astrakhani do Margelana" [*From Astrakhan to Margelan*] in 1895 and "Iz Turkestanskikh vospominanii" [*From Turkestan Memories*] 1899, she recounts her journey through Russian Turkestan. These travelogues detail her route: crossing the Caspian Sea by boat, stopping in Petrovsk and Uzun-Ada, traveling along the Trans-Caspian Railway, and visiting Samarkand, where she describes its streets, parks, and population. From there, she continued along the postal road from Samarkand to Margelan, with a stop in Kokand and Tashkent. In the later article, "Iz Turkestanskikh vospominanii," Lobry shares her recollections of interactions with the indigenous population.

Her narrative focuses primarily on her experiences in transit and on exploration of the physical spaces, with particular attention to architecture and various local attractions. Travel that took place outside of Russian Turkestan, which included travel by boat and railway, was described without negativities. Yet as soon as Lobry started to travel within the boundaries of Russian Turkestan, travel became an unpleasant experience. Especially travel by postal road is described as being thoroughly unpleasant, describing the bumpy roads, the long wait for horses and the surrounding scenes were empty and lifeless.[98] In Samarkand, Lobry describes the various towers, mosques and medreses, as well as the parks and bazaars.[99] These are her mini conquests, as Pratt wrote, not of kingdoms, but of destinations. These mark the characteristics of the capitalist vanguard that Lobry reproduced in her travel narrative.

Like the other women travelers discussed in this chapter, Lobry does not engage deeply with the local population. In "Ot Astrakhani do Margelana," she primarily describes Sart men as

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[98] Olga Petrovna Lobry, "Ot Astrakhani do Margelana" [*From Astrakhan to Margelan*], *Russkii vestnik*, no. 5 (1899), 605.

[99] Ibid., 602.

perpetually lazy and idle, stating that they only become lively when they have the opportunity to go to the bazaar—another common stereotype found in Russian travel narratives about Central Asia.[100] Her depiction reinforces the existing Orientalist trope of Central Asian men as passive and unproductive, except in spaces of trade and commerce. Her only reference to Sart women is a brief, detached observation:

> The Sarts live in seclusion; their wives, by law, are not supposed to appear before unrelated men, which is why they leave the house only under a chadra—a thick, long veil made of horsehair. A robe with long sleeves thrown over the head hides the entire figure of the Sart woman, and the sleeves billow awkwardly in the wind.[101]

Her description mirrors the standard portrayal of Muslim women as secluded and hidden from public view. The emphasis on the "closed-off" nature of Sart life and the imagery of long, concealing garments being distorted by the wind reinforces a sense of otherness. Rather than attempting to understand or engage with these women, Lobry offers a fleeting remark that aligns with familiar tropes, reducing Sart women to passive figures whose presence is defined by their invisibility.

In "Iz Turkestanskikh vospominanii," Lobry shifts her focus to political tensions in the region, addressing a riot in Turkestan in which twenty Russian soldiers were killed. In this context, she attempts to profile the Sart population, constructing an image of their character and perceived tendencies. She primarily describes Sart men as naïve and hospitable, portraying them as welcoming and unthreatening. However, she also suggests that this outward demeanor may not reflect the full reality. This suspicion arises from an encounter with a preacher giving a

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[100] Ibid., 609.

[101] Ibid., 608. All translations from Lobry's work are my own.

speech that she perceived as hostile. When she inquired about his message, she was told that he was expressing anger over Sart youth becoming immoral and engaging in theft. Yet, she remained unconvinced that this was the full truth, suspecting that his words were, in fact, directed against the Russian presence in the region. When she voiced her concerns about this possible anti-Russian sentiment, those around her dismissed them, waving away her worries.[102] Despite this moment of doubt, her overall portrayal of the Sart people remains generalizing and one-dimensional. Even in this discussion, she entirely omits Sart women, reinforcing the idea that they exist only in the margins of public life. By excluding them from her broader analysis of Sart people, Lobry further contributes to their erasure, presenting them as figures of silence and passivity within an already generalized and superficial portrayal of the local population.

Like the capitalist vanguardist mode of travel writing, Lobry's focus remains on physical landscapes and architectural landmarks rather than meaningful engagement with local people. When she does reference the Sart population, her portrayals are reductive—men are either idle or suspiciously compliant, while women exist only as veiled figures on the periphery of public life. Even in her discussion of political tensions, she approaches the Sart population with a mixture of condescension and distrust, questioning their true intentions while disregarding the voices of Sart women entirely. In doing so, Lobry's narrative aligns with the broader patterns seen in Russian colonial discourse, where local populations are observed but not understood, categorized but not engaged with.

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[102] Olga Petrovna Lobry, "Iz Turkestanskikh vospominanii" [*From Turkestan Memories*], *Russkii vestnik*, no. 5 (1899), 227-228.

Lucy Atkinson

Born in London in 1817, Lucy Atkinson, née Lucy Sherrard Finley, worked as a governess to General Muravyov's daughter in St. Petersburg when she became acquainted with Thomas Atkinson.Their marriage happened quite quickly, following only a few meetings and an exchange of letters. Two days after marrying Thomas Atkinson on February 20, 1848, she set out to travel into Siberia.[103] The Atkinsons traveled together for over six years (1848–1853), journeying through Siberia, the Sayan Mountains, the Altai Mountains, and parts of present-day Kazakhstan and Mongolia. During their travels, Lucy gave birth to their son, Alatau Tamchibulak Atkinson, named after the place of his birth in what is now Eastern Kazakhstan. Thomas Atkinson, an artist and architect, stated that his primary motivation for venturing into Central Asia was to capture the native scenery and landscapes through his art. His expeditions also served as a way to document the culture and environment of the region, which was largely unknown to Western audiences at the time. Lucy accompanied him throughout these journeys, and upon her return to London she published a book compiled from her letters, called *Recollections of the Tartar Steppe and its Inhabitants.*

Atkinson frequently emphasizes her capabilities as a traveler, always assuring the reader that she is no less skilled than the men around her. She highlights her expertise in traditionally masculine domains, particularly horseback riding and marksmanship. In one such account, she describes navigating the treacherous Alatau mountains in search of a campsite. When her horse stumbled on a steep ascent, she skillfully regained control, preventing a dangerous fall. She notes

[103]Nick Fielding, "Thomas and Lucy Atkinson: Pioneering Explorers of the Steppe," *Asian Affairs* 49, no. 1 (2018): 27–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2018.1416009, 33.

that this feat earned the admiration of the Kalmuks, whom she describes as excellent riders, implying that their praise was a meaningful validation of her ability.[104] Similarly, Atkinson crafts an opportunity to showcase her courage when she prepares to shoot a bear that had left tracks near their camp. Despite there being no indication that the bear would return, she loads her rifle and imagines the admiration she would receive upon successfully killing it. Though the bear never reappears, she takes satisfaction in astonishing a Kalmuk companion with her determination.[105] In both cases, Atkinson constructs a narrative where her skills and bravery set her apart, reinforcing the adventuress model of narration, in which women travelers depict themselves as extraordinary individuals fully capable of excelling in the male-dominated sphere of exploration.

Her imitation of men at times becomes performative, where she takes on a masculine role in her interaction with Kazakhs. At one of the *auls* that the Atkinson's stopped, Thomas wanted to draw the local woman. Thus, Lucy invited the women for tea, yet she refused to pour tea for the men.

> I wish you could have seen the dismay pictured on the faces of the men, to whom I was cruel enough not to offer even a glass. Tea concluded, I had meat brought in and served to my guests. This was the crowning point; the 'lords of the creation' could no longer stand this slight, so arose and made their exit, and I saw no more of them that night. The women appeared to enjoy the fun of the thing[106].

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[104]Lucy Atkinson, *Recollections of Tartar Steppes and Their Inhabitants* (London: John Murray, 1863), https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/atkinson/steppes/steppes.html#VII, chapter 4.

[105] Ibid.

[106]Ibid., chapter 8.

By refusing to serve the men, Atkinson is not only mimicking the kind of social authority typically exercised by European men over colonized subjects but also enacting a form of cultural correction. Her behavior suggests an attempt to "teach" the Kazakh men a lesson in European manners. This goes beyond a performance of masculinity and enters the realm of active intervention, reinforcing her perceived moral superiority. In doing so, she positions herself not only as aligned with European male authority but also as a civilizing agent, reshaping local gender dynamics in accordance with European norms.

Atkinson's depiction of Kazakh women closely mirrors dominant imperial narratives that framed Central Asian women as oppressed and subjugated, reinforcing the colonial perception of nomadic societies as backward and in need of intervention. She portrays Kazakh women as "true slaves to man," emphasizing their role in servitude while contrasting it with the supposed privilege of men, whom she describes as being waited upon in every aspect of life. She writes:

> Poor woman! her lot in a future existence, it is to be hoped, will be an easier one, as here she is a true slave to man, contributing to his pleasure in every way, supplying all his wants, attending to his cattle, saddling his horse, fixing the tents, and I have even seen the women helping these 'lords of the creation' into the saddle […] Do fancy, for a moment, what a position a woman fills. A dog is even considered her superior. When a favourite one is going to have pups, carpets and cushions are given her to lie upon; it is stroked, caressed, and fed upon the best of everything. Women alone must toil, and they do so very patiently.[107]

By claiming that even dogs receive better treatment than women, she underscores an extreme power imbalance, positioning Kazakh society as fundamentally unjust and dehumanizing to women. This rhetoric aligns with broader colonial discourses that depicted indigenous women as

[107] Ibid., chap 7.

victims of their own culture, a trope that was frequently used by men in their travel narratives.

Atkinson's narrative reflects a dual imitation of male travel writers: she not only adopts their adventurous persona by emphasizing her physical prowess and courage, but she also replicates their imperial discourse in portraying Kazakh women as subjugated. By highlighting her own mastery of traditionally masculine skills, she aligns herself with the male explorer archetype, seeking validation from both her companions and her readers. Simultaneously, her depiction of Kazakh women as oppressed mirrors the rhetoric of male imperial travelers who framed indigenous societies as regressive. In both cases, Atkinson positions herself within the conventions of male-authored travel writing.

Conclusion

The travel narratives of women in late 19th and early 20th century Russian Turkestan reveal a complex interplay between imitation and adaptation of male literary conventions. As demonstrated through the works of Anna Rossikova, Iulia Golovnina, Olga Lobry, and Lucy Atkinson, these women navigated the constraints of a male-dominated literary sphere by adopting narrative strategies that mirrored the authoritative, empirical tone of male explorers and the goal-driven rhetoric of capital vanguards. Their writings reflect Elaine Showalter's "Feminine" phase of literary development, in which women sought legitimacy by conforming to established male norms rather than challenging them. In doing so, they often reproduced the same colonial and patriarchal tropes that characterized male-authored travel narratives, particularly in their depictions of indigenous women.

Rossikova's naturalist and capital vanguardess styles, Golovnina's blend of adventuress and naturalist approaches, Lobry's focus on architectural conquests, and Atkinson's emphasis on

adventures and prowess all highlight the ways in which these women sought to assert their credibility within the scientific and exploratory communities. However, their adherence to male conventions often came at the cost of reinforcing stereotypes about Central Asian women, portraying them as either passive and oppressed or overworked and commodified. While these narratives occasionally offered glimpses of nuance—such as Golovnina's recognition of Kazakh women's autonomy or Atkinson's detailed descriptions of daily life—they largely failed to engage deeply with the lived experiences of indigenous women. Instead, they perpetuated the same reductive and objectifying discourses that served to justify imperial expansion and cultural domination.

The adventuress narrative trope, as exemplified by Golovnina and Atkinson, represents a unique contribution to the framework of women's travel writing. By emphasizing their physical prowess, resilience, and ability to navigate traditionally masculine domains, these women carved out a space for themselves within the male-dominated sphere of exploration. Yet, even as they challenged gender norms through their adventurous personas, they often reinforced colonial hierarchies by depicting indigenous women as passive or subjugated. This duality underscores the tension between their desire for literary legitimacy and their complicity in perpetuating imperial ideologies. Ultimately, the travel narratives of these women naturalists, adventuresses, and capital vanguardesses reveal both the possibilities and limitations of their literary strategies. By imitating men, they gained access to the literary sphere, but in doing so, they also reproduced the same structures of power and exclusion that defined male-authored travel writing. Their narratives thus serve as a testament to the complexities of women's literary production in a colonial context, highlighting the ways in which gender, power, and empire intersected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Chapter 3

Beyond Imitation:

Exploratrices Sociales and Women Ethnographers

Introduction

While imitating men was a common strategy for women writing in a male dominated field, there are examples of women displaying resistance to dominant colonial narratives, revealing nuance and complexities of the lives of Sart and Kazakh women. Though still shaped by the colonial and imperial frameworks of the 19th and early 20th centuries, their travelogues provide valuable glimpses into the daily experiences of Central Asian women. Women such as Lucy Atkinson, Maria Nalivkina, Annette Meakin, made use of their access to Central Asian women and left valuable ethnographic sketches of their lives in their narratives. They traveled through Central Asia, or lived in the case of Nalivkina, in the 1840's, 1870's and 1900's respectively. The narratives of these women, though sometimes adopting a detached scientific tone—such as in Meakin's case—primarily emphasize ethnographic exploration rather than the conquest of territories or the naturalist description of the region's geography. Unlike male travelers and ethnographers, who often depicted Sart and Kazakh women as voiceless victims of patriarchal oppression, these women writers portrayed them as active participants in labor, social life, and even financial management. Their privileged access to private spaces, such as the *ichkari* and other domestic settings, allowed them to engage directly with indigenous women, offering rare, complex insights that challenged prevailing stereotypes.

Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's concept of the "subaltern," this chapter explores how these travelers amplified the voices of Central Asian women. By focusing on domestic spheres and

fostering direct communication with indigenous women, these authors provided a counter-narrative to the silencing of local women in colonial discourse. Their works reveal that Central Asian women were not passive subjects but individuals with complex lives, engaging in labor, social interactions, and financial management. Through this lens, the chapter highlights how gendered perspectives in travel narratives can challenge dominant colonial frameworks and offer a more nuanced understanding of marginalized groups.

Theoretical Discussion

In Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak", she raises the issue of representation of marginalized groups, specifically in the context of postcolonialism and in relation to women. Her main argument is that within the existing power structures, the subaltern cannot represent themselves or be represented without reinforcing the existing power structures. Using the example of Sati women, she illustrates how the colonizers claimed these women did not wish to be burned alive, while local men insisted they did. However, neither group sought the perspectives of the women themselves, leaving their voices absent from the dominant discourse. In this context, Spivak highlights how the subaltern woman's voice is silenced. Moreover, she effectively introduced the concept of the "silent, doubly oppressed woman," shaping not only academic discourse but also the imagination of Western scholarship about Eastern women. It is quite convenient that in Spivak's example of Sati women we will never be able to know what the women themselves thought.

Building on Spivak's framework, the depiction of Sart and Kazakh women in 19th-century Russian Turkestan offers a compelling example of the double subaltern. If we rely

solely on how Western men portrayed these women, they appear as quintessentially silenced figures, denied a voice under both the colonial regime of Russian administration and their patriarchal societies. Sart women, for instance, wore veils, rarely left their homes unsupervised by male relatives or husbands, and lived in the women's quarters of the ichkari. Their lives were often mythologized by colonial actors, with both Sart and Kazakh women described as slaves of their husbands. These conclusions were based on passive observation rather than genuine interaction with indigenous women. If we consider only the voices and narratives of passive observers, who tended to be male travelers, then one could confidently proclaim: "Central Asian women are true slaves! Silent and doubly oppressed."

However, a different picture unfolds if alternative sources are considered, such as travel narratives written by people who had access to indigenous women and who were willing to listen to their voices. Women authors, who often remain on the periphery of academic research, provide a more nuanced portrayal. Several scholars have highlighted the differences in representation between men's and women's narratives. For example, Billie Melman, in her book *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, Sexuality, Religion and Work*, examines how English women engaged with the Middle East, focusing on the intersections of gender, colonialism, and cultural interactions. Unlike male travelers, who often wrote with a sense of superiority and domination, Melman argues that women travelers sometimes showed "an identification with the other that cut across the barriers of religion, culture and ethnicity."[108] When discussing the difference between the perception of harems by men and women, she states that while men sexualised and exoticized the harem, women travelers "banished the exotic, to

[108] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, Sexuality, Religion and Work, 1718–1918*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1995), 8.

recreate the harem in the image of the middle-class home: domestic, feminine and autonomous."[109] This suggests that women travelers could potentially portray native women in a more humanized, complex manner.

This distinction can partially be attributed to access. Women had access to the inner courtyards of the Sarts and had the opportunity to not only observe, but also to talk to the women, albeit often with a translator. Thus, indigenous women were more likely to engage in conversation with other women. However, not all women who had access to indigenous women used this privilege to gain a more nuanced understanding of their lives, as evidenced by the analysis of the previous chapter. Thus, it may also be the case that women and men had different points of interest in their travel. While this divide is not black and white, men tended to be more interested in the industrial aspects of the colonies, while women tended to focus on social explorations. This distinction was highlighted by Pratt, she observes that men often wrote as "capital vanguards," while women wrote as "exploratrices sociales."[110] The capital vanguard's sense of identity was expressed through scientific erudition, adventure and survival, while the *exploratrices sociales* expressed their sense of identity through personal independence and social authority.[111] The narratives of e*xploratrices sociales* often focused on domestic settings. Pratt argues that this is not only because of different spheres of interest, but of different "modes of constituting knowledge and subjectivity."[112] Women displayed authority in private spaces, as they sought to collect and possess themselves, in what Pratt calls "their personal, room-sized

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[109]Ibid., 101.

[110]Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 2007), chapter 7.

[111]Ibid., 156.

[112] Ibid.

empire."[113] While both men's and women's narratives reflected class values, Pratt states that women's accounts often conveyed greater sympathy and provided a more nuanced portrayal of political matters than those of their male counterparts.[114]

While women travelers often provided richer ethnographic details than their male counterparts, their accounts remained embedded within colonial frameworks. Their social explorations, though distinct from the industrial and economic focus of male travelers, were still shaped by imperial ideologies. As Mary Louise Pratt suggests, the *exploratrices sociales* did not merely observe but actively participated in a form of female imperial intervention, positioning themselves within the broader "civilizing mission."[115] Atkinson's role in playing into dominant colonial narratives has been discussed in the previous chapter. Meakin situated herself within a pre-existing colonial discourse on Central Asia, reinforcing colonial frameworks by asserting authority over local knowledge and categorizing indigenous populations through racialized and essentialized stereotypes. Her descriptions of Sarts, Uzbeks, and Tajiks rely on sweeping generalizations that serve to justify imperial hierarchies, framing certain groups as more favorable based on their perceived cooperation with colonial powers. Nalivkina described in great detail the sericulture of Sart women, which might have been due to colonial interests of extracting profit from Turkestan. While her descriptions are nuanced, at times she falls back onto dominant colonial narratives, such as presenting prostitution of Sart women as a positive outcome of the colonial rule that furthers the eventual goal of unveiling and emancipation.

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 154

[115] Ibid., 157.

These constraints are important to acknowledge, yet they do not entirely negate the possibility of resistance within colonial narratives. While women travelers' accounts were shaped by imperial ideologies, they also contained moments that challenged dominant representations, revealing complexities that Spivak's notion of the doubly subaltern may not fully account for. Rosalind O'Hanlon's critique of the Subaltern Studies is useful for addressing some of these limitations. In her essay *Recovering the Subject*, O'Hanlon challenges the idea that subaltern voices are entirely absent from the historical record.[116] While acknowledging that colonial discourse imposes silencing mechanisms, she argues that subaltern agency can still be traced within existing sources, even if those sources are mediated by imperial power structures. Rather than assuming that indigenous women are wholly voiceless within colonial texts, O'Hanlon suggests that historians and literary scholars should look for moments where these voices emerge, however faintly, through the cracks of dominant discourse.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the accounts analyzed in this chapter, which depict indigenous women not merely as passive figures but as active participants in their societies. Narratives by Nalivkina and Meakin, for example, provide insight into how Sart women generated income—whether through textile production, market trade, or sericulture—challenging the dominant colonial portrayal of them as entirely secluded and economically dependent. Meakin, in particular, at times amplified the voices of Sart women, using their own words to dispel common stereotypes about their supposed passivity or lack of intelligence. While these depictions remain entangled within colonial frameworks, they nonetheless offer glimpses of indigenous women's daily lives, labor, and resilience, complicating

[116] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 189–224, 223.

the notion that they were entirely erased from historical representation. Unlike Spivak's framework, which risks reinforcing the idea of the subaltern as a completely silent subject, O'Hanlon's perspective allows for a more dynamic reading of these narratives—one that acknowledges both the power of colonial discourse and the agency of those it seeks to represent.

Lucy Atkinson

While Atkinson's narratives are at times condescending and imperialist, her book contains many accounts and detailed descriptions of the daily lives of Kazakh women, a rarity among travel narratives written by men. Like many travelers who have come after her, Atkinson saw a slave in the Kazakh woman, criticizing the uneven workload among the genders.[117] It is quite ironic that she had not noticed the same dynamic between herself and her husband, where all the duties of looking after their son and of housekeeping fell on Lucy's shoulders, while her husband spent his time painting sceneries of the steppe. Regardless, Atkinson's narratives are interesting because they focus on daily encounters, where she is invited in by the women into the closed quarters of their dwelling. This proximity to the local women and the informal context allowed her to describe the daily lives of these women: how they took care of their children, how they mourned the dead, how they giggled at tea parties. Lucy dedicates a lot of the space in her accounts to women and children, and her child often helped facilitate friendly relations. Her narrative style can be best described as the *exploratrice sociales*, outlined by Pratt.

In the following excerpt Lucy tells us of a mourning ritual of kazakhs, a vulnerable moment she was allowed to witness. They camped one night at a Kazakh aul, where she heard

[117] Lucy Atkinson's *Recollections of the Tatar Steppe and its Inhabitants*,(London: John Murray, 1863), https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/atkinson/steppes/steppes.html#VII, chapter 7.

sobbing. She asked if she could enter the yurt of the bereaved and was given a positive answer. Here is how she describes the mourning ritual:

> "I found two women, the wives of the deceased, kneeling before a pile of baggage, saddles, etc., placed on one side of the tent; they were moving their bodies to and fro, and chanting in concord, and evidently in verse, and at the end of each verse the body was bent more forward, and for a second a stoppage, with the sound of 'ach,' or perhaps I may more and better compare it to a deep sigh. They kept time beautifully. The notes were so exceedingly musical, and so expressive of sorrow, that the tears flowed from my eyes."[118]

Lucy Atkinson's detailed account of the mourning ritual underscores her unique ability, as a female traveler, to access private and intimate spaces within Kazakh society. Unlike male contemporaries, whose observations were often limited to public spheres, Atkinson was able to witness and document the emotional and domestic lives of women, such as their synchronized chants and movements during mourning. Her nuanced description contrasts sharply with later dismissive portrayals of Central Asian music as monotonous, instead highlighting its expressive and sorrowful beauty.[119] This privileged access, facilitated by her shared gender, allowed Atkinson to produce a more humanized and multidimensional portrayal of Kazakh women, exemplifying the significance of gender in shaping the traveler's narrative perspective.

Returning to the episode described in the previous chapter—when Atkinson invited all the women of the *aul* for tea but refused to pour tea or serve meat to the men—her actions offer a

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[118] Ibid., chapter 8.

[119] Merchant, Tanya. 2014. "Narrating the Ichkari Soundscape: European and American travelers on Central Asian Women's lives and Music." In *Writing Travel in Central Asian History,* ed Green Nile, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 193-212. While Atkinson's account offers a unique, gendered perspective on Kazakh mourning rituals, it is worth noting that other travelers also appreciated Central Asian musical traditions. See Guillaume Capus, "La musique chez les Kirghizes et les Sartes de l'Asie centrale," *Revue d'ethnographie* 5 (1886)

rare glimpse into her efforts to establish a connection with local women. As she recounts: “This was the crowning point; the 'lords of the creation' could no longer stand this slight, so arose and made their exit, and I saw no more of them that night. The women appeared to enjoy the fun of the thing.”[120]Atkinson could allow herself such boldness because of her status as a foreign guest, which gave her a degree of social leeway. Depending on the lens through which it is viewed, this moment may be seen as either an act of solidarity or as a subtle assertion of cultural superiority. Yet what I want to highlight in this moment is less the authority she exercised over the men, and more the way she invited the women into a shared experience—one marked by humor and playfulness. Her exclusion of the men, while certainly provocative, creates a brief space where women are centered and allowed to simply enjoy themselves. Atkinson’s narration of their amusement suggests a genuine sense of camaraderie and a desire to momentarily bridge the distance between herself and the local women. In this way, the episode reads as a rare moment of cross-cultural intimacy and mutual recognition, however fleeting or limited by its broader colonial context.

In another account Lucy describes a tense conflict during which the tribe's leader incited violence against the Atkinsons, planning to kill them and seize their belongings. The situation deescalated after the travelers defended themselves with firearms, leading to an uneasy truce. It was in the aftermath of this hostility that a woman approached Lucy, initiating a symbolic act of peace:

> My reflections were, however, disturbed by my observing that the men were leaving the rock. They went towards their yourt; and shortly after, a woman, I presumed one of the wives of our host, came towards me. I again grasped my pistol, but this was not an

[120] Lucy Atkinson’s *Recollections of the Tatar Steppe and its Inhabitants*, chapter 7.

> unfriendly visit, for she brought a Chinese silk handkerchief with a mother-of-pearl decoration, and presented them to the boy. After she left, I sent one of the Cossacks with the child's red hat, which I had made him in Kopal, as a present to one of the children. Had I offered a bar of gold, it would not have given half the pleasure this hat did. Alatau had now a felt one, which I had procured from a Tartar, decidedly more useful, but nothing like so fine as the one I had made.[121]

After this gift exchange, the kazakhs hosted them in their aul and had a sheep killed in their honour. The Atkinsons invited the leader of the aul into their yurt and drank tea together. This encounter highlights how Lucy Atkinson portrayed the Kazakh woman as an active agent in deescalating the tense situation. The woman's decision to approach Lucy with a peace offering, a silk handkerchief for Alatau, demonstrates her role in fostering reconciliation, subtly countering the aggression initiated by the men. Lucy's own status as a woman likely facilitated this exchange, as her maternal role and calm demeanor positioned her as a less threatening figure. By reciprocating with a handmade red hat for the woman's child, Lucy reinforced the bond, leveraging shared experiences of motherhood to bridge cultural divides.

Lucy Atkinson's accounts offer a rare glimpse into the lives of Kazakh women, portraying them as active participants in their communities rather than passive subjects. Her narratives emphasize the emotional and domestic spheres, from mourning rituals to playful tea gatherings, where women's agency is evident in both their customs and interactions. Atkinson's unique position as a female traveler granted her access to these private spaces, enabling her to observe and document the complexities of their daily lives with a level of intimacy unavailable to male contemporaries. Whether witnessing their synchronized chants of mourning or engaging in symbolic exchanges of peace, Lucy's writing highlights moments where cultural barriers were bridged through shared experiences of womanhood and motherhood. These moments not only

[121] Ibid., chapter 7.

humanize the Kazakh women she encountered but also demonstrate her willingness to align herself with them.

Maria Nalivkina

The Nalivkins conducted their ethnographic study in the region of Ferghana valley during the years of 1878 through 1884, right after the annexation of Khokand by general Kaufman. Vladimir was a Russian officer under the command of general Skobelev; in 1884 he was recalled on reserve to Kokand and he moved there with his wife Maria.[122] This was a time when ethnography on the region was abundant, but the Nalivkins sought to fill the gap in knowledge about how the women of the region lived, as they noticed that little was being written about them.[123] Kamp poses that Nalivkins' ethnography was inspired by Fedchenko's *Travels in Turkestan* and Khoroshkin's *Collection of Articles Regarding Turkestan Territory*, who published their works in 1875 and 1876 respectively[124]. Both of these authors briefly mention Sart women, however do not delve deeper into their domestic lives. The Nalivkin settled in the village of Nanay and lived there for six years, with Maria having a good command of the Uzbek language.[125] Having Maria Nalivkina as a co-author of their book presented unique opportunities to describe the *ichkari*, the designated women's area in the inner part of an Uzbek house, a space previously inaccessible to the Russian reader. Kamp infers that materials pertaining to direct contact with Uzbek women must have come from Maria, as Vladimir could not have been

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[122] V. D. Nalivkin et al., *Muslim Women of the Fergana Valley: A 19th-Century Ethnography From Central Asia*, 2016, 2-3. All quotes are cited from the English translation published in Kamp's edited volume.

[123]Ibd., 10.

[124]Ibd.

[125]Ibd., 1.

admitted to the *ichkari*.[126] I operate on the same assumption in this chapter, and therefore include Maria Nalivkina by name when referencing these accounts.

Maria befriended their Uzbek neighbors and her narrative is based on her observations of the social interactions within the inner court of the Uzbek household.[127] This focus on the social life in the domestic sphere of the local population allowed Nalivkins to describe the everyday life of Uzbek women in great detail. Their book includes detailed descriptions of almost all aspects of Uzbek women life, including religion, appearance and clothing, occupation, sketches about their customs and habits, pregnancy and childbirth, and they trace their whole lives starting from childhood to marriage to widowhood or divorce and death, covering the way of life of both the rich and the poor. But these were not just dry descriptions of their costumes, Nalivkins portrayed Uzbek women as lively and proactive with agency over their own life.

Nalivkins do not assume that the Uzbek woman is passive, forced to sit idly in the *ichkari*, with her only purpose being servitude to her husband. Uzbek women were not described as idle slaves, Nalivkins wrote about how household chores were split between the men and the women. While the men were responsible for all activities outside the house and those related to agriculture, the women's responsibility lies within the house, such as feeding cows, preparing food and mending clothes.[128] While it was true that it was the man's job to provide financial support for his wife,[129] women had options of procuring finances outside of being dependent on their husbands. Spinning yarn, cleaning cotton and breeding silkworms are described as optional occupations that women took up to make additional money. By cleaning cotton a woman could

[126] Ibid., 7.
[127] Ibd., 1.

[128] Ibd., 110.

[129] Ibd., 113.

make 1 ½ rubles a week, given that she had help from her children.[130] Spinning yarn could bring 40 to 80 silver kopeeks per week.[131] They state that successful breeding of silkworms can be the most profitable of the available occupations, however it is the most labor intensive.[132] They note that some women also embroidered and then sold their crafts, earning 80 silver kopeeks per week[133]. All of these numbers are provided alongside a detailed description of the process of the labor.

The Uzbek women handle their financial transactions through a middleman, usually their husbands, who take their craft to the bazaar to sell, bringing back the profit. They also rely on their husbands to bring mulberry leaves to feed the silkworms, which was a source of constant quarrels for married couples:

> The wife demands more leaves and hustles the husband to bring them from the bazaar or the orchards outside the city. The husband scolds her for forcing him out of the house and spending money for some worms, which may or may not bring any profit. "May you die if you don't bring me leaves!" scolds the wife. "May you die! What am I going to do without them? The worms will die; my labor will be lost. It's all because of you. Go, faster, go!"
> "I am fed up with you and your worms; it is all useless, just a waste of money; no good will come out of it!" "If you don't go, I will take your robe to the pawn-shop; I will go for the leaves myself." "You will? Before you pawn my robe, I will trade all your worms." They reach the point of starting a fistfight before the husband finally puts on his robe and goes to get the leaves or, to be precise, to get mulberry branches. Sarts say that there was one year, thirteen to fifteen years ago, when for some reason the price for the mulberry twigs soared. They claim that it

[130]Ibd., 106.
[131]Ibid.

[132]Ibd., 107.

[133]Ibd., 109.

> was the year when the number of divorces was the highest, and there have never been as many divorces as in that memorable and hapless summer.[134]

This is not a portrait of an idle passive woman who can only obey the wishes of her husband. From this interaction described by the Nalivkins, it is clear that taking up silkworm breeding was a gamble that did not promise profit, and the husband saw it as a nuisance. Meanwhile, the wife relied on breeding silkworms as a source of independent profit; thus, frustrated that the husband is refusing to run errands for her, as she is unable to do them herself because of social norms. Nalivkins paints a portrait of a proactive woman who has some control over her finances.

Moreover, Nalivkins actively acknowledges Uzbek women's agency. When discussing divorces, they wrote that Uzbek women's situation is better than that of European women:

> Tyranny can be practiced here only if the material conditions make it impossible for the woman to use her right to divorce. When we introduce the latter to our readers later, they will better understand that in some respects the Muslim woman's situation is better and the range of her personal rights is wider than it is for women of European peoples.[135]

In the eyes of the Nalivkins, tyranny of the men is not a default situation that Moser and Schuyler are painting it out to be in their narratives.[136] Tyranny is conditional, but if material conditions allow it, they imply that women are treated better under the threat of divorce. Women had the right to divorce their husbands, and in the case if the divorce is initiated by the husband,

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[134]Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 123.

[136] From the first chapter of this thesis

the wife received a payout called *mahr* that was agreed upon before the marriage.[137] Nalivkins viewed divorces as a way in which Uzbek women had more freedom and control over their lives.

The Nalivkins' ethnographic work offers a nuanced portrayal of Uzbek women, focusing on their daily lives, social interactions, and agency within the constraints of their cultural and economic systems. By emphasizing the *ichkari*, a space typically inaccessible to male ethnographers, Maria Nalivkina was able to document the domestic sphere with remarkable detail, capturing the routines, labor, and financial endeavors of Uzbek women. Rather than depicting them as passive figures confined to servitude, the Nalivkins present them as proactive individuals who contributed to their households through spinning yarn, breeding silkworms, and other income-generating activities. These women are portrayed as negotiating power within their marriages, as evidenced by disputes over resources like mulberry leaves, showcasing their determination to assert financial independence. Furthermore, the Nalivkins actively challenge the stereotype of tyranny as a default in Muslim households, highlighting women's legal rights, including the ability to divorce and receive financial compensation through mahr. Their work underscores that Uzbek women were not silent subjects but dynamic actors navigating complex social and economic realities, offering a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric views of their contemporaries.

Annette Meakin

Annette Meakin, born 1867, was an English writer and scholar who worked in the disciplines of geography and anthropology. Meakin had a prolific academic career, where she

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[137] V. D. Nalivkin et al., *Muslim Women of the Fergana Valley: A 19th-Century Ethnography From Central Asia*, 2016, 180.

wrote multiple travel narratives, journal articles, and a book that focuses on women's rights, *Women in Transition*. In 1903 she was made a fellow of the Royal Anthropological society and an honorary member of the Goethe Society of Weimar[138]. In 1913 she was inducted as a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and is renowned as the first woman to travel through the Trans-Siberian railway from England to Japan.[139] She traveled to Russian Turkestan a total of two times, the first time in 1896, and then again in 1902 with her mother, and traveled through the cities of Tahskent, Samarkand, Bokhara and Ferghana. In the introduction of her book, she states that her purpose for visiting Central Asia was to study the local variety of Islam. Previously, she had observed islamic practices in Morocco, among the Tatars in Kazakh, Crimea and Siberia, the Arabs in Egypt and Turks in the Ottoman Empire. Her book, *In Russian Turkestan: A garden of Asia and its people*, was published in 1903 in London, where she recounts her travels to Russian Turkestan.

Meakin did not treat Sart women as voiceless objects. She actively sought out the company of local women and questioned them, albeit through a translator, about various stereotypes to check if they were truthful. This approach centered the voices of indigenous women and presented them as subjects rather than objects. Perhaps, Meakin's own marginal status as a woman allowed her to distance herself from the traditional narratives of dominance and power over the "Oriental woman." Her interactions with them are genuine and her narrative is humanizing, where at times she identifies with the indigenous women. For example, she is hesitant in giving a generalized description of the Sart woman's dress, something that her male

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[138] Tanya Merchant, "Narrating the Ichkari Soundscape: European and American Travelers on Central Asian Women's Lives and Music," in *Writing Travel in Central Asian History*, ed. Nile Green (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 193–212, 197.

[139] Ibid.

colleagues had no qualm doing.[140] She writes: “In describing the dress and personal appearance of Sart women, I should give an erroneous impression were I to speak of any one habit or custom as if it were a hard and fast rule. There is as much variety in their indoor dress as in our own.”[141] There are no broad generalizations and she acknowledges the individuality of each woman that she has met.

This is not a singular instance of identification with indigenous women of Russian Turkestan. In another passage Meakin describes how she and a Sart girl were examining each other's hair and make-up.

> One girl graciously allowed me to touch her plaits. I took each of them in my fingers and examined it carefully -- there was no wig in question -- she had fifty-five long plaits, and all her own hair. When I spoke of this to a Russian merchant who had resided for some years in Samarkand, he replied: ‘Yes, that is very well, but if you had examined them more closely, you would have discovered that all the women wear wigs.’ It is just the same in England; when your hair curls naturally strangers say: ‘what a lot of time that woman must waste before her glass.’[142]

This passage displays identification with local women in her comparison of the experiences of Sart and English women. Meakin draws a parallel between the skepticism surrounding the Sart girl’s natural hair and the assumptions faced by British women in regards to curly hair. It is interesting that in this instance Meakin chooses to side with the indigenous woman rather than the colonial representative. Thus, she blurs the boundary between "us" and "them," fostering a sense of shared experience across cultural divides.

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[140] For example Moser, who gave a very generalized description of what women wear in their inner quarters, in Анри Мозер and Наполеон Ней, *Франкоязычные путевые очерки о Центральной Азии: путешествия Наполеона Нея и Анри Мозера во второй половине XIX века*, trans. Снежана Атанова (РАН, 2023), 362.

[141] Meakin, *In Russian Turkestan*, 120.

[142] Ibid., 121.

Besides identifying with the indigenous women she actively disproves stereotypes that she has found false through communicating with Sart women. In one instance she tells the reader that she has often heard that Sarts never change their undergarments and wear them until they fall from their bodies in rags. Instead of accepting this as the truth, she asked a Sart woman whether that is true. The Sart woman disproves this myth and informs Meakin that all respectable people wash their clothes every two to three weeks.[143] In another instance, she comments on the pearly white and beautiful teeth of Sart girls. She notes that she has not seen them paint their teeth black, despite being told that this is a common practice. According to her sources, the custom arises because they often begin losing their teeth before the age of twenty-five, and blackening of all teeth helps conceal the gaps.[144] These examples illustrate that Meakin is not merely reproducing dominant stereotypes about indigenous women, but engages with the local population and brings their voice into her narrative.

Interestingly, when discussing labor habits of the Sarts, she flips the narrative about Sart women in her descriptions. While her male colleagues often commented on how the Sart woman does no labor and is idle, Meakin describes a drastically opposing picture. She states that some Sart women are very thrifty and work hard while their husbands are lazy and do nothing.[145] This type of narrative was usually reserved for the Kazakhs, but seldom used in regards to the Sarts. She continued by stating that there were cases where a wife would support the entire family by cultivating silkworms and selling her embroidery.[146] In her chapter on public baths, Meakin describes another source of income for women. Some women sold soaps in the baths, while

[143] Ibid., 132.

[144] Ibid., 123.

[145] Ibid., 146.

[146] Ibid.

others took money for guarding the garments of women that have entered the baths.[147] Meakin's perspective challenges prevailing stereotypes by highlighting the industriousness of Sart women, reframing them as active contributors to their households and communities rather than passive figures confined to idleness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the works of Lucy Atkinson, Maria Nalivkina, and Annette Meakin provide detailed accounts of the lives of Central Asian women, offering a perspective that challenges dominant colonial and patriarchal narratives of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Through their unique access to private and domestic spaces, these authors portrayed Sart and Kazakh women as active participants in their households and communities. Atkinson's account of Kazakh women's mourning rituals and her symbolic gift exchange highlights the emotional and social agency of the women she encountered. Nalivkina's detailed descriptions of silkworm breeding and women's economic activities reveal how Uzbek women negotiated financial independence within domestic constraints. Meakin, through her refusal to perpetuate stereotypes and her accounts of Sart women's labor, such as soap-selling in public baths, reframed these women as industrious contributors to their families.

Using O'Hanlon's critique of Subaltern Studies, this chapter demonstrates how these narratives amplify voices traditionally marginalized in colonial discourse. By focusing on the specific and everyday experiences of Central Asian women, these travel accounts enrich our understanding of gendered experiences in imperial settings and emphasize the importance of seeking out alternative sources to challenge conventional narratives. Similar accounts by authors

[147] Ibid., 158.

such as Ella Maillart's *Solo Turkestan*[148] or Zhilinskaya's *Puteshestvie po goram Srednei Azii* (Journey Through the Mountains of Central Asia)[149] further illustrate how women travelers engaged with indigenous communities in ways that sometimes complicated dominant colonial representations. Examining these texts alongside the works of Atkinson, Nalivkina, and Meakin highlights a broader pattern in which female-authored travel writing, while still shaped by imperial ideologies, offered more nuanced portrayals of local women than their male counterparts.

[148] Ella Maillart, *Turkestan Solo: One Woman's Expedition from the Tien Shan to the Kizil Kum*, 1938.

[149] E. Zhilinskaya, *Puteshestvie po goram Srednei Azii* (*Journey Through the Mountains of Central Asia*) (Warsaw: Politseiskaya Tipografiya, 1902)

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how women travelers in the late 19th century represented indigenous Central Asian women, revealing both colonial constraints and moments of nuanced engagement. The dominant colonial narratives represented Central Asian women as passive and oppressed. Male travelers, lacking direct access to indigenous women's lives, reinforced stereotypes drawn from prior accounts rather than firsthand observation. While female travelers had greater access to Central Asian women, this did not always lead to more complex representations. Women travel writers, seeking legitimacy in scientific and travel discourse—traditionally male-dominated fields—adopted the objective, authoritative tone of their male counterparts. Travelers such as Olga Lobry, Anna Rossikova, and Iulia Golovnina, as well as to some extent Lucy Atkinson, relied on this strategy of imitation, mirroring the scientific tone and narrative tropes of male travelers. In doing so, they often reproduced colonial clichés rather than challenging them. Their focus on proving their competence as travelers or scientists sometimes took precedence over deeper ethnographic engagement. Thus, representation of indigenous women in such narratives remained limited, resulting in a perpetuation of cliches that have been stated before, either shaped by reader expectations or by confirmation bias. However, among women travelers there are those who made use of their privileged access to Sart and Kazakh women, which resulted in a more nuanced representation. Women such as Annette Meakin, Maria Nalivkina and Lucy Atkinson wrote in an ethnographic style, focusing on Central Asian people, especially women. Their travel narratives offer a glimpse into the daily lives of Central Asian women, as well as at times challenging stereotypes and identifying with local women.

That being said, it is important to note that travel narratives of these women remained rooted in colonial discourse. These women exercised authority in private spaces, as Pratt phrased it, "a room-sized empire."[150] Moreover, their narrative most likely had personal or colonial motivations. Meakin was seeking scientific accreditation, leveraging her access to the inner court of Sart houses as a unique perspective available to her, framing it as taking the reader to a private space never seen before.[151] Nalivkins' description of Sart sericulture may have been motivated by potential profits from this industry, as the Russian colonial administration was seeking ways of profiting from the colony. Despite Atkinson's detailed descriptions, she ultimately reinforces dominant narratives of Kazakh's supposed backwardness.[152]

So, can the subaltern speak through alternative historical sources, such as women-authored travel literature and ethnographic accounts? Gayatri Spivak famously argues that the subaltern cannot speak, as any representation of their voices remains filtered through dominant colonial discourses that reinforce existing power structures. However, Rosalind O'Hanlon challenges this perspective by urging scholars to look beyond traditional colonial archives and consider alternative sources. Women-authored travel narratives, such as those examined in this study, serve as one such alternative. While still shaped by imperial ideologies, these texts provide a different vantage point—one that offers insights into indigenous women's lives that male-authored travelogues largely ignored.

The descriptions of Sart and Kazakh women's economic roles, domestic activities, and social practices complicate the image of passive subjugation often presented in colonial

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[150]Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 1992, 156.

[151]Meakin, *In Russian Turkestan*, 120, 107.

[152] Lucy Atkinson's *Recollections of the Tatar Steppe and its Inhabitants*, ch 7.

discourse. Meakin's inclusion of Sart women's voices in challenging stereotypes, Nalivkina's documentation of their financial independence and divorce practices capture aspects of indigenous women's agency. Atkinson's travelogue, while still shaped by colonial discourse, offers a more detailed and humanizing portrayal of Kazakh women's daily lives. Her descriptions of mourning rituals, for instance, move beyond generic colonial tropes of passive or oppressed indigenous women by depicting their emotional expressions and communal roles. While these descriptions do not necessarily indicate agency in the same way as Meakin's documentation of Sart women challenging stereotypes or Nalivkina's accounts of women's economic roles, they do counter the dehumanizing abstraction often found in male-authored accounts. Instead of presenting Kazakh women as nameless figures within a broader colonial narrative, Atkinson's attention to their customs and communal roles is a more nuanced depiction of their lived experiences. These accounts are mediated by imperial perspectives, yet they provide access to local women's voices, daily lives, and resistance in ways that male-authored texts often do not.

The implications of this study extend beyond historical inquiry. First, it highlights the importance of re-evaluating women-authored travel literature as an alternative historical source. While these narratives do not escape the colonial framework, they offer perspectives that complicate dominant portrayals of indigenous women. This underscores the necessity of reading colonial-era texts critically, not only for the biases they contain but also for the glimpses they provide into indigenous women's lived experiences. Second, this research contributes to broader discussions on indigenous representation in historical and contemporary discourse. The tendency to depict indigenous women either as passive victims or as figures of resistance continues in

present-day scholarship and media.[153] Examining historical travel narratives through a nuanced lens helps challenge these binary portrayals, emphasizing the diversity of indigenous women's roles, identities, and strategies of negotiation within colonial and patriarchal structures. Finally, this study reinforces the value of interdisciplinary approaches in feminist and postcolonial scholarship. By applying Spivak's and O'Hanlon's frameworks to travel literature, it demonstrates how texts shaped by colonial discourse can still yield insights into the lives of marginalized groups. Future research could expand on this by incorporating oral histories, indigenous perspectives, and comparative analyses with non-European travel accounts to further nuance the study of Central Asian women's histories.

[153] Alima Bisenova, "Konstrukt 'zhenshchiny Vostoka' i problema ee spasenia v kolonial'nom, rannesovetskom i novom liberal'nom diskursakh" ["The Construct of the 'Eastern Woman' and the Problem of Her Salvation in Colonial, Early Soviet, and New Liberal Discourses"], in *Labirinty sovremennogo postkolonial'nogo diskursa*, ed. Alima Bisenova (Qazaqstan: Tsentar sovremennoi kultury Tselinnyi, 2023).

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