

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Following the breakdown of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has been an enormous increase in the interest in ex-socialist countries among social scientists. This interest is evident in the flourishing of literature on the region as well as the increasing prominence of post-Soviet studies programs at many universities. The dissolution of the Soviet Union not only required social scientists to review and reformulate their assumptions and theories but also provided a fresh field for the new generation of political scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians.

However, research on the region has been largely restricted to state or institution-centric studies that focused on structural adjustment and macro-economic issues or political and religious movements and institutions. Unfortunately, not much has been said on the impacts of economic and political changes upon social transformation in general, and upon social stratification and culture in particular. While the changing roles, statuses, and position of women did not constitute a main area of concern in this increasing body of literature, the living conditions and situation of Eastern European and Russian women have, nevertheless, received relatively more interest than those of their sisters in the other ex-Soviet republics, namely of Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>1</sup>

This volume has attempted to bring together scholars from different countries to share their insights on the experiences and position of women in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey in order to provide a comparative map of a region, where states have taken major initiatives in shaping women's roles and status, particularly in public life. The pace and extent of economic change, state intervention, and cultural changes within the private sphere are some of the fundamental dimensions of comparison used here. Issues and problems of identity, particularly national and gender identity, are common to most of the cultures dealt with

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<sup>1</sup> A short bibliography of some of the prominent studies on women's conditions and issues in Eastern Europe and Russia has been provided.

in this volume, and thus provide a basis for the discussion of similarities as well as differences.

The comparison of Central Asian and Caucasian countries with Turkey is a very relevant, but so far neglected, endeavor in the literature. It is well known that many of the former Soviet countries have significant historical ties and share cultural roots as well as a common religion, Islam, with Turkey. Despite this however, these countries had a quite different historico-political experience from Turkey and for three quarters of a century any socio-cultural exchange amongst them was virtually halted. This fact renders the comparison of similar cultures that had taken thoroughly different routes highly interesting and relevant for the future of the region. The presence of remnants of socio-cultural ties that extended beyond contemporary national borders and could nonetheless be revived in the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration to form potential bases of political and economic linkages makes such comparison meaningful and interesting.

With the disintegration of the USSR, the question of whether Turkey would set a model for the Central Asian Republics in the process of democratization and the transition to market economy started to be discussed among political scientists and international relations experts. In terms of economic relations, numerous Turkish firms began to invest in the region, which became a promising trade partner. Social and cultural exchange also flourished with student exchange programs and visiting scholars. Migration is yet another dimension of the relationship since Turkey has been receiving immigrants continuously from the region.

In comparing the socio-political and economic circumstances of the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus with Turkey, state intervention, its timing and extent as well as style, is of the essence. Similarly, such comparison needs to take into account the role played by the market economy in all these countries. Turkey experienced the development of market economy much earlier when compared to Central Asia and the Caucasus, regions that are only currently undergoing such a transition. In all cases, the state has been the main instigator of social change and modernization processes that have been launched in the name of Westernization in Turkey and for the sake of communism in the USSR. Furthermore, both of these processes incorporated a significant gender dimension in their ideologies and mobilized women, in

unprecedented forms and scales, as both actors and symbols of the socio-cultural transformation they aimed at.

In this sense, the present volume attempts to review the social, economic and political conditions of these societies through a lens that has not been used much in the region, that of the women's point of view, with the unique methods and conceptualizations of feminist scholarship. It is hoped that a cross-cultural analysis of women's position in these societies, where gender relations have neither been very extensively studied nor adequately presented to the English-speaking world, will contribute first and foremost to the wealth of literature in international women's studies field. Furthermore, it is hoped that such analysis will ensure a deeper understanding of some of the most relevant aspects, such as identity issues, of contemporary politics in the region.

The articles in this volume can be categorized, on the one hand, in terms of the two salient dimensions of change in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey. The first is the economic circumstances shaped by structural adjustment policies, globalization, and transnational developments. The second is the cultural dimension of change where the focus is on institutions such as family, education, and religion. While the contributions by Beneria, Moghadam and Dayioğlu fall into the first category, the remaining articles focus on the latter aspect of change. Needless to say, in the real life conditions of the communities reviewed in this volume, these two aspects of change intermingle and influence each other. However, an analytical division seems helpful in the examination of globalization and fragmentation as apparently opposite trends.

Besides the analytical separation between economic and cultural dimensions, another line of differentiation characterizing the contributions to this volume is with respect to the work of area specialists as opposed to the studies by women's studies experts and scholars from various disciplines. Whereas authors such as Rorlich and Tohidı are area specialists whose analyses reflect interdisciplinary perspectives, others, like İmamoğlu, Hortaçsu and Baştuğ, Heyat, and Dayioğlu approach their topics from the perspective of and with the analytical tools of their respective disciplines.

In this volume, the first set of articles, under the heading of "*Patterns of Female Participation in Competitive Markets*", highlights the gender-specific impacts of market transition and the formation of global markets. Lourdes Beneria's "*Gender and the Construction of*

*Global Markets: Engendering Polanyi's 'The Great Transformation'*” discusses the gender dimensions of the growth of global markets with specific emphasis on the tension between the assumptions of economic rationality associated with market behavior and the real life experiences of many women. She suggests that as international capital increases production in the economies of post-Soviet Central Asian countries and the Caucasus, the employment of women at relatively low wages is likely to follow. Her argument that the question of placing the economic activity and the market at the service of human development needs to be gendered sets the basic tone of this part of the volume.

Valentine Moghadam, in her article “*Gender and Economic Reforms: A Framework for Analysis and Evidence from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey*”, develops a framework for understanding and explaining gender-differentiated outcomes of market reforms. She analyzes the relationship between gender ideology and political economy and argues that the persistence of traditional gender ideology explains the vulnerability of women against economic restructuring.

The section ends with Meltem Dayıođlu’s article entitled “*Labor Market Participation of Women in Turkey*”. Dayıođlu discusses the inequality in education between women and men in Turkey and its impacts on the functioning of the labor market. Her argument is that in Turkey, the inequitable allocation of resources for the female child’s schooling reflects itself in the labor market through the lower labor market participation of women.

The next set of articles comprise the section “*Changing Home Domain*” where the transformation of the private sphere as a result of socio-cultural change is discussed. Nuran Hortaçsu and Sharon Baştuđ’s “*Women in Marriage in Ashkabad, Baku, and Ankara*” is based on research conducted on families in three Turkic capitals focusing on the position of women within the family. While these three societies (Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey) share historical origins, religion (Islam) and traditional patriarchal family systems, they differ significantly in population size, level of industrialization, dominant political influences and dominant sects of Islam. Perhaps rather unexpectedly, Hortaçsu and Baştuđ conclude that in all three societies historical trends and predominant cultural values, rather than the level of industrialization, explain variations in family functioning and women’s status and role within the family.

They thus underline the relative salience of the cultural dimension in the social transformation of the private realm in particular.

In her essay *“Changing Gender Roles and Marital Satisfaction in Turkey”*, Olcay İmamoğlu sets the focus on Turkey as she explores different types of marriages in Turkey and their influence on the spouses’ marital satisfaction. She argues that there has been a trend from traditional to more modern marriages as a result of the rapid social change following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Her findings indicate that in Turkey, women’s marital satisfaction is positively related to their education, their freedom to choose their own spouse and to marry at a later age, as well as the extent to which they contribute as wage earners, participate in family decisions and develop egalitarian relationships.

Sharon Baştuğ and Nurah Hortaçsu in their ethnographic work, *“The Price of Value: Kinship, Marriage and Meta-Narratives of Gender in Turkmenistan”*, elaborate on the constitution and maintenance of the Turkmen kinship system and household structure. Baştuğ distinguishes patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence as the most important factors that shape the family structure and inherently disadvantage women. The Turkmen kinship system, according to the authors, devalues women as daughters and sisters while attributing great value to them as wives, daughters-in-law and mothers, which is represented by a prolonged and demanding rite of passage for women beginning with the wedding celebration.

The section *“Experiences of Change in the Past”* opens with Azade-Ayşe Rorlich’s *“Intersecting Discourses in the Press of Muslims of Crimea, Middle Volga and the Caucasus: The Woman Question and the Nation”*, where she traces the meanings of these discourses as the Muslims of the Russian Empire enter the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Rorlich, the entry and inclusion of the Muslim women of the Russian Empire into the public debate signaled the systematic problems confronting the Muslim communities of the Empire. Despite its specificities, the Russian colonial project was similar to that of the French and the British in the sense that it linked the advancement of the Muslims to the change in the status of Muslim women, i.e. Russia’s exotic ‘other’ that legitimated the “mission civilisatrice” of the Russians. Rorlich argues that the voice of the colonizer can be challenged by bringing the voices of the Muslims themselves into the picture. Thus, by examining three Tatar and Azeri women’s journals, she points out that Muslim women hardly fit into the sub-

missive and downtrodden image imposed on them by the dominant discourse.

Similarly, Nükhet Sirman considers the relationship between nationalist discourses and gender roles in her *“Gender Construction and Nationalist Discourse: Dethroning the Father in the Early Turkish Novel”*. Sirman criticizes the emphasis on the symbolic aspects of the nationalist discourse for, she argues, this has diverted attention from concern with social relations. She views the creation of new models of femininity and masculinity articulated in nationalist discourses as part of the effort to restructure family practices. It is argued that the discourse of love and compassionate marriage made it possible for the pre-modern extended family ideal to be replaced by that of the modern Turkish nuclear family. The author suggests that while the role of the state in this transition has been much emphasized it was the men and women of the middle classes in Turkey who redefined the family and created the family norms during the process of nation-building.

In her case study *“Azeri Women’s Life Strategies in the Soviet Context”*, Farideh Heyat reviews the changes brought about in women’s lives by the Bolshevik Revolution and analyzes the varying notions of femininity in Azeri society, before and after the revolution. She discusses Azeri women’s particular coping strategies to reconcile the varied and sometimes conflicting expectations of their community with those of the Soviet state. According to Heyat, these women resorted to different mechanisms to cope with the double burden of careers and heavy domestic duties. Chief among them was the system of reliance on the family and intergenerational support. Heyat’s analysis also reveals clues for understanding the gender-based dynamics of adaptation to social change.

The last section of the volume consists of the articles grouped under the title of *“Gender and National Identity Construction”*. Colette Harris, in her *“The Changing Identity of Women in Tajikistan in the Post-Soviet Period”* evaluates the impact of the socio-economic and political changes in post-Soviet Tajikistan on the identities of Tajik women. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tajiks have encountered economic collapse, the revival of Islam, and a civil war which resulted in extremely difficult living conditions, particularly for women. Harris maintains that there is a difference between women’s ‘ideal’ identities and their real identities in Tajik society

and women claim the 'ideal' traditional identities as part of their strategy for self-protection and high self-esteem.

Ayşe Saktanber and Aslı Özataş-Baykal shift the focus to a neighboring country, Uzbekistan, in their article entitled "*Homeland within Homeland: Women and the Formation of Uzbek National Identity*", where they analyze the making of national identity in post-Soviet Uzbekistan by focusing on a specific local institution, the mahalla, i.e. the neighborhood community. The authors examine the parameters of the formation of Uzbek national identity from the point of view of everyday social practices and thus point out how women operate as a linkage between micro and macro practices of power that are exercised to maintain the new national order.

In the second essay on Uzbekistan, "*Women's Position In Uzbekistan Before And After Independence*", Dilarom Alimova and Nodira Azimova evaluate Soviet policies to emancipate women and discuss the problems that emerged due to this process. They analyze women's organizations in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. The authors argue that women are the guardians of tradition, particularly in the rural areas. In the ethnographic section of their study, they examine the living conditions of women in villages and mahallas of the Fergana Valley with respect to their roles and functions in the organization of rites.

The final article is another ethnography from the North Caucasus. Seteney Shami, in her article "*Engendering Social Memory: Domestic Rituals, Resistance and Identity in the North Caucasus*", examines power and dominance relations within the domestic sphere among Circassian women. She points out the changing nature of these relations parallel to women's new forms of participation in the market place and trading and analyzes the complex relationship that emerges between women's new role as chief breadwinner and their age-old one as custodian of tradition.

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