FROM ARAL-SEA TO SALT-SOIL IN ABDIZHAMIL NURPEISOV'S *FINAL RESPECTS*: GENDER, KAZAKH ECOCRITICISM AND THE SOVIET MODERNISATION MIRAGE IN THE STEPPE

by

VERENA ZABEL

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Student: Verena Zabel

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies Program by:

Susanna Lim	Chairperson
Katya Hokanson	Member

and

Andrew Karduna	Interim Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Division of Graduate Studies.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Verena Zabel

Master of Arts

Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies Program

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Title: From Aral-Sea to Salt-Soil in Abdizhamil Nurpeisov's *Final Respects*. Gender, Kazakh Ecocriticism and the Soviet Modernisation Mirage in the Steppe.

In my thesis, I am analysing Soviet Kazakh writer Abdizhamil Nurpeisov's novel *Final Respects*. I argue that Nurpeisov's novel presents both environmentalist criticism and a multivocal description of Soviet Kazakh identity. Nurpeisov's complex social analysis of Kazakh identity is expressed through the narrative style. The narrative structure itself gives voice to multiple points of view through shifting narrative voice(s) and focalisation(s). This reflects the various opinions and worldviews of the Kazakh population, oscillating between traditionality and sovietisation. Neither Soviet influence nor Kazakh identity are depicted as monolithic. Similarly, the novel's ecocriticism and its depiction of women is complex and multifaceted. Women are often essentialised through negative characteristics, but the novel also parallels gender oppression with environmental exploitation. While the juxtaposition of women and nature echoes ecofeminist criticism, the negative essentialisation of women contradicts a direct ecofeminist interpretation.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Verena Zabel

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Russian, 2021,University of Oregon
Master of Arts, German, 2019, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Internationale Literaturen, Eberhard Karls Universität

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

20th Century Literature, Russian and Russophone Literature, Central Asian Literature, Women's Literature

Feminist Theory, Environmental Theory, Postcolonial Theory

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee as Russian instructor, University of Oregon, 2019-2021

Graduate Employee as German instructor, University of Oregon, 2017-2019

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

General University Scholarship, University of Oregon, 2020/21

Russian East European and Eurasian Studies Program (UO), Lindholm Summer Graduate Research, Summer 2020

General University Scholarship, University of Oregon, 2019/20

F.G.G. Schmidt Fellowship, German Department (UO), Summer 2018

DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst), Study Abroad Grant (for Moscow) 2015/16

PUBLICATIONS:

Zabel, Verena. "Whose Voice Is It Anyway? The Politics of Narrative Stylistics in Arthur Schnitzler's *Fräulein Else* & Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*." Master's thesis, University of Oregon, 2020.

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"Можно сказать, что 'Последний Долг' книга о том, как, попирая закон Бога, законы природы, человек, войдя в азарт, перестал замечать, что в конечном счете он разрушает самого себя."

Abdizhamil Nurpeisov[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

The desiccation of the Aral Sea is a well-known environmental disaster of Central Asia. Since the 1960s, the once fourth largest sea of the planet (by surface) has been continuously shrinking. The sea used to reach from contemporary Northern Uzbekistan far into Western Kazakhstan. Between 1960 and 1989, i.e., within less than three decades the sea lost about 41% of its surface area. Two decades later, in 2009, only 10.6% of the former Aral Sea were left.[2] The desiccation of the Aral Sea was mainly caused by extensive irrigation of the steppe which diverted massive amounts of water away from the two rivers feeding the Aral Sea (the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya). Additionally, the dams built to create hydroelectricity in the Eastern Kazakh SSR[3] as well as the Kirghiz SSR further trapped large amounts of water.[4] As less water reached the Aral, the sea

1 Nikolai Anastas'ev, *Nebo v chashechke Tsvetka. Abdizhamil Nurpeisov i ego knigi v mirivom literaturnom peizazhe* (Almaty: Olke, 2006), 303. "You could say that *Final Respects* is a book about how man, violating the law of God, the laws of nature, getting excited, stopped noticing that, eventually, he is destroying himself." All translations from the Russian are mine.

2 See Philip Micklin, "The Future Aral Sea: Hope and Despair," *Environmental Earth Sciences* 75, no. 9 (2016): 3. Here, I am giving the numbers for surface area, which differ from those in terms of volume.

3 Soviet Socialist Republic

4 See Maya K. Peterson, "Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin," March 15,

began to shrink rapidly. As Maya Peterson argues, the root of the crisis does, however, not exclusively lie in the Soviet exploitation of their Central Asian periphery. Instead, she proposes to examine the crisis in the light of the "logic of the irrigation age," i.e., an imperial logic that believes in its own knowledge as universal and therefore underestimates and/or ignores local differences. The simple idea was that European engineering could transform deserts into blooming landscapes and this dream already existed under Tsarist rule over the region.[5] By the mid 19th century, Russia had annexed large parts of the Kazakh steppe and throughout the next decades, Tsarist forces advanced further south. Already in 1885, the Ferghana valley (contemporary Uzbekistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan) was used for cotton production, and larger projects to build irrigation canals were planned in order to transform the Central Asian steppe into the centre of cotton production. While the Tsarist empire was only able to begin these projects on a small scale, under Soviet rule these projects were fully realised.[6] The transformation of the steppe was one of Moscow's modernisation mirages: they established the region as the main supplier of cotton for the Soviet economy, a goal that could only be realised through extensive irrigation. These changes were in part also welcomed by the local population. Especially for the generation who was born and grew up under Soviet rule, Soviet modernisation became to symbolise development, progress and better living conditions. Thus, while many Soviet Central Asian writers openly criticised the environmental degradation in their republics, the Soviet modernisation

2021, Central Asia Program at the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University, USA, video, 1:00:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_D9xpF7bqD0.

5 See ibid.

6 See Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), 191.

endeavour itself was also appreciated. Olzhas Suleimenov, a Russophone Kazakh writer, celebrated the successful space mission that sent Gagarin into space in a poem, describing it as a Soviet achievement; but he was also a leading figure in the Kazakh anti-nuclear movement in the late 1980s. The Russophone Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov celebrated communal work in the kolkhozes (farming collectives) in his stories, but also harshly criticised Stalinist repression through his novels. Similarly, Kazakh writer Abdizhamil Nurpeisov's novel *Final Respects* (*Соңғы парыз*, [lit. Last Duty/Obligation,] 1982) presents a detailed description of the devastating environmental crisis of the Aral Sea, but he also depicts the sedentarization of nomads positively. Despite the fact that sedentarization was forcefully pushed by the Soviet regime, Nurpeisov depicts it in terms of historical progress and emphasises the positive impact of irrigation in an essay[7] written between 1964-1970:

> В степь пришла вода, и с нею жизнь. Человек вмешался в извечный распорядок, заведенный на земле, вздохнул в мертвую пустыню какую-никакую жизнь. Радуюсь ли я этому? Безусловно. (221)

He further envisions modernisation for Kazakh auls[8]: "В следующем году в каждом доме будет пресная вода, и тогда, надеюсь, мои земляки аральцы сумеют, проявив усердие, затопить голые, пыльные сейчас улицы зеленью."[9] (ibid., 222). Here, the contrast to the depiction of the devastating environmental crisis in *Final Respects* is

[7] The essay is originally written in Kazakh, I am citing Gerol'd Berger's translation. All essays are taken from the same tome: Abdizhamil Nurpeisov, *Vozvyshaia Nashi Sviatyni* (Almaty: Oner, 1996). In the following I will refer to this collection as "Essays". Except for this essay, the other are originally written in Russian by Nurpeisov.

[8] Kazakh villages

[9] "By next year, every house will have fresh water and, then, I hope, my Aral countrymen, having displayed diligence, will be able to flood the naked, currently dusty streets with greenery."

particularly marked and shows how the hopes of progress and prosperity through Soviet modernisation turns into disillusion at the sight of the devastating environmental and human catastrophe of the Aral Sea. As the water recedes and potable water becomes scarce, people start moving away from the auls. The Soviet modernisation mirage dissolves into air and all that is left is an almost uninhabitable environment.

Moscow's careless treatment of the periphery's environment is not surprising in the context of its general attitude towards Central Asia, both during the Tsarist as well as the Soviet regimes. Thus, both considered the vast Kazakh steppe as mainly uninhabited and often encouraged Russian peasants to move there. During Tsarist reign this created conflicts with the local nomadic population because the peasants often simply occupied, for instance, the nomads' winter pastures. While Tsarist Russia had relatively little influence in the area and mainly followed the rule to not intrude neither into the cultural nor religious lives of the people, the Soviet Union was far more invasive. Central Asia and, particularly, contemporary Kazakhstan were the scene of many human and environmental tragedies during the twentieth century. One of those was the Kazakh famine. It is generally assumed that about 25%[10] of Kazakhs died during the famine in the early 1930s. While the famine itself was, to some extent, consciously created by the Soviet government, Moscow did not foresee the horrific magnitude of the crisis. In her book on the Kazakh famine, Sarah Cameron explains that the famine itself does not classify as genocide according to the definition in the United Nation's "Genocide Convention" (1948), although it could be described as genocide according to the former

[10] In Kazakhstan itself, it is considered that is was rather more than 25%, possibly even about 50%, as Fariza Adilbekova, a friend of mine from Kazakhstan, reports.

definition of the term by Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin (1943), which includes the intent to destroy the way of life and culture of a people. According to Cameron, the latter certainly did happen: "Through collectivisation, Moscow sought to destroy nomadic life, a key feature of Kazakh culture and identity" (178).[11]

Collectivisation,[12] the forced settlement of the nomadic people, the arrival of more Slavic settlers, combined with a terrible drought in 1931, were deadly to the Kazakh population already vulnerable to famine because of the Soviet assault on Kazakh *bais* (wealthier nomads) in the 1928 confiscation campaign[13] (see ibid., 99). For the Soviets, the bais were simply the Kazakh equivalent to Slavic kulaks, while, in reality, wealth itself was never stable in the Kazakh steppe where a change in weather conditions could decimate the Kazakh herds. Thus, the Soviet interpretation of bais betrays their utter lack of knowledge about local environmental conditions as well as their ignorance of Kazakh culture, which is based on kinship and relies on practices of mutual aid. Indeed, within a kinship group, those with larger herds (i.e., bais) supported others in times of need (see ibid., 32-34; 74f.). Thus, kinship ties and the accumulation of wealth (i.e., cattle) served as a social mechanism that could counteract the negative environmental impact of a drought through mutual aid. During the confiscation campaign, the Soviets confiscated large amounts of animals from those who, in Soviet opinion, owned too many animals.

[11] Sarah I. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018).

[12] In order to build the Soviet economy, large scale collectivisation took place. This meant that people were assigned to kolkhozes (collective farms). The land as well as the tools and machinery were owned collectively. They received production quotas set by Moscow in the five-year plans and had to fulfil these quotas.

[13] The confiscation campaign was a tool that was implemented in order to regulate the amount of personal wealth someone was allowed to own. It was intended as anti-capitalist measure. The confiscated wealth became state property.

The result was an abrupt decline in livestock numbers in Kazakhstan, partly because animals were killed in large numbers by Soviet activists when they were unable to feed them, partly because Kazakhs chose to slaughter their own animals rather than give them over to Soviet authorities. Additionally, Kazakhs were in need of food since their trade of meat for grain with Ukrainian and Russian peasants was made impossible due to collectivisation (see 108). However, the Soviet regime was *not unable* to provide support where it was seen as necessary for the sustenance of the Soviet economy. Coal workers (who mostly were *not* Kazakhs), for instance, were fed through the agricultural work of prisoners in Karlag prison camp in Central Kazakhstan and thereby were hardly impacted by the famine at all. Kazakhs, on the other hand, were often simply left to starve. As Cameron points out, "while Kazakhs could starve, coal workers could not" (119). This clearly showcases Soviet priorities. While coal workers were seen as productive workers and were therefore vital for the Soviet economy, Kazakh nomads simply were not, and therefore, dispensable.

Another assault on the Kazakhs was the nuclear testing cite in Semipalatinsk which was established in August 1949. In Semipalatinsk nuclear underground bombs were tested, thereby exposing the local population to high amounts of radiation. A UNESCO report reveals that "approximately 2,6 million people fell victim to genetic mutation as a result of prolonged exposure to radiation."[14] The report also explains that

[14] See "Audiovisual Documents of the International Antinuclear Movement 'Nevada-Semipalatinsk'," UNESCO, accessed May 26, 2021, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-1/audiovisual-documents-of-the-international-antinuclear-movement-nevada-semipalatinsk/.

the 468[15] nuclear explosions that were conducted there, in combination, exceed the bomb of Hiroshima by 45,000. The impact of nuclear testing was deeply felt by the population, and in the late 1980s it found expression in the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement. Shortly after independence, on August 29, 1991, the first Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbaev signed the order to close the Semipalatinsk polygon. Since 2009, this day is commemorated around the world as the International Day against Nuclear Testing,[16] attesting to the global impact of the Kazakh anti-nuclear movement. The long lasting, devastating impact of nuclear testing in the region has also found expression in contemporary Central Asian literature, e.g., in *Когда рухнул мир* (1990) [transl. as *The Day the World collapsed*, 1991], a novella by (mostly Russophone) Kazakh writer Rollan Seisenbaev who was born 1946 in Semipalatinsk, as well as in Uzbek writer Hamid Ismailov's Russophone novel *Вундеркинд Ержан* [trans. as *The Dead Lake*, lit. Wunderkind Erzhan] (2014).

From the desiccation of the Aral Sea and the Kazakh famine to the nuclear catastrophe in Semipalatinsk, they all reveal Moscow's willingness to sacrifice human and environmental health for the sake of industrialisation, modernisation and, in the case of nuclear testing, the arms race with the U.S. These disasters reveal the development of communist ideology from anti-imperialist to a neo-imperial attitude towards its Central Asian periphery. While Lenin had early on included the national right to self-determination in the Bolshevik party manifesto, in reality, this right was not accorded.

[15] The UNESCO report does not give this number, it is however given as the exact number in many Russophone Kazakh sources, for instance, "Mezhdunarodnyi Den' Deistvii Protiv Iadernykh Ispytanii," Qasaqstan Tarihy, accessed May 26, 2021, https://e-history.kz/ru/calendar/show/26596/.

[16] See "International Day Against Nuclear Tests 29 August," United Nations, accessed, May 26, 2021, https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-nuclear-tests-day.

Indeed, the campaign to strengthen national languages in the national republics was abandoned in the late 1920s because it was feared that the people might start forming a distinct national consciousness and try to gain independence.[17] The USSR was nonetheless willing to incorporate the national population into the Soviet apparatus instead of depending on a Russian administration as the late Tsarist regime had done. This, however, does not represent a discontinuity between Russian and Soviet empires because the Russian empire itself had often relied on the tactic of including local elites into their administrations. The inclusion of national cadres was followed by the Stalinist purges between 1936 and 1938 during which "the whole leadership, not only in Ukraine, but in all non-Russian republics, was removed and executed."[18] After the purges, the administration was filled mainly with Russian cadres and local "nationalists" were targeted.[19] After Stalin's death and with de-stalinization, a return to a more tolerant policy in regards to local languages and cultures occurred. Additionally, integration of non-Russians into the Soviet administration was again encouraged. Then, around 1972, a new wave of repressive policies followed which only softened in the early 1980s. In the particular context of Soviet Kazakhstan, it needs to be highlighted that after the famine, the deportation of other ethnic minorities into the Kazakh SSR and the continued immigration of Russians, the percentage of Kazakhs was only about 36% in 1979. This needs to be kept in mind in relation to Nurpeisov's novel, which is set roughly in the 1970s. Thus, while it is written in Kazakh and describes the lives of ethnic Kazakhs, it

17 See Kappeler, 351f.; 356.
18 See ibid., 356.
19 This is reflected in *Jinlar basmi yoxud katta o'yin* (2016, transl. as *The Devil's* Dance, 2018) by Hamid Ismailov. The Uzbek novel depicts the horrendous impact of this ideology on Uzbek writers, several of whom are sentenced to death for supposedly propagating nationalist ideas.

describes the lives of a people who constituted an ethnic minority within their own republic. In the following, I will first provide an introduction to Nurpeisov and his novel. Then, I will situate Kazakh literature in relation to Slavic Studies and present the methodology as well as the outline of this thesis.

1.1. Biographical Introduction to Nurpeisov

Abdizhamil Nurpeisov is not a writer who is particularly well known in the West, and neither are his novels. Therefore, a short introduction to his life, as well as his novel *Final Respects* (*Соңғы парыз*, 1982) is necessary. My description of Nurpeisov's life is mostly taken from his Russian-language essay "Автобиография" (Autobiography, 1987)[20] and I endeavour not only to present some rough facts about his life but also try to present him as a person, for *Final Respects* is not only a literary text, it is also one that is deeply connected to the writer himself and what he considered to be his duty as a writer.

Abdizhamil Nurpeisov is a Kazakh author who was born in a fishing aul[21] on an island in the Aral Sea in 1924. He survived the famine in the early 1930s thanks to his father who "в голодный тридцать второй год прокормил свою большую семью одной лишь дичью"[22] (Essays, 15). His father became a fisherman during collectivisation and later the chairman of the local aul soviet. Nūrpeisov grew up in a polygamous family. Polygamy itself is not uncommon in Central Asian societies, but it nonetheless informs

[20] I am occasionally using the Russian language Wikipedia entrance on Nurpeisov for particular information about year dates whenever he does not specify them in his autobiography, see "Nurpeisov, Abdizhamil Karimovich," Wikipedia, accessed May 26, 2021, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Нурпеисов,_Абдижамил_Каримович.

[21] Kazakh village

[22] "In the hungry year of '32, fed his big family with nothing else but game."

about the social situatedness of Nurpeisov's family. As Gregory J. Massell has pointed out:

> polygamy was sanctioned by both religion and custom, though it tended to be practiced more consistently in settled village communities and towns than in the nomadic-pastoral milieu, and was prevalent primarily among relatively well-off and privileged strata. (6)[23]

The way Nurpeisov writes about his mother, the first wife of his father, expresses a latent critique of polygamy, even though he does not express it in terms of socio-cultural oppression. While he writes about both his parents with reverence, when he recounts his mother's life, he furthermore emphasises the difficulty of her situation:

> В те годы я, хотя и был босоногим мальчишкой, бегавшим за ягнятами, с мучительной ясностью восприимчивого детского ума сознавал, как трудно жилось моей бедной матери. [...] Несмотря на то, что она была первой женой отца, ее молодая, красивая и более удачливая соперница, женщина жестокого характера, легко брала над ней верх, выживала ее из дому, и мать моя не вынесла такого душевного смятения и горя, вскоре заболела и умерла еще совсем молодой. (ibid.)[24]

This paragraph shows his alertness to inequities, even though the suffering of the mother is rather ascribed to the scheming of his father's second wife than to a particular socio-religious context. Under Soviet rule, polygamy was officially prohibited. Despite this, the practice continued to exist far into the 30s. Indeed, the purges during the late 1930s also

[23] Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[24] "In those years, although I was a little barefoot boy, running after the lambs, did I, with the painful clarity of a sensible, child-like mind, realise how difficult the live of my poor mother was. [...] Despite being the first wife of my father, her young, beautiful and more successful rival, a woman with a cruel character, easily surpassed her, drove her out of the house and my mother could not endure such mental turmoil and grief; she soon got ill and died being still very young."

targeted "Communists found still veiling their wives and practicing polygyny."[25]

During World War II, at the age of 18, Nurpeisov was conscripted into the army and was stationed near Stalingrad. In 1943, he became a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He lost his father, as well as three uncles[26] to the war. After the war, Nurpeisov continued his studies and began to work on his first novel, *Курляндия*[27] (Kurland), about his experiences in the war, which was published in 1950. He first began his studies at Kazakh State University but after his first year decided to attend Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow instead. Throughout his literary career, Nurpeisov wrote in Kazakh and deeply engaged with Kazakh history and culture. Upon graduating in 1956, he began working on his trilogy *Blood and Sweat* (*Қан мен тер*, 1961-70), a novel that is set in the Kazakh steppe during the time of the Bolshevik revolution, and was inspired by the memory of his ancestors as well as their sufferings and struggles in the steppe (Essays, 258). It was also the land itself, his *родная земля*,[28] that inspired him. This found expression in his dilogy *Final Respects*, (*Соңғы парыз*, 1982) a novel born out of the desperation about the environmental crisis of the shrinking Aral sea. Indeed, he felt it to be his duty as a writer to draw attention to the catastrophe affecting his people and their environment: "долг писателя [...] вижу в том, чтобы обнажить социальную

25 Douglas Taylor Northrop, *Veiled Empire Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 211.

26 In his autobiography he only mentions two uncles, whereas in his essay "О моем народе" ("About my people") he describes having lost three uncles and his father to the war (see Essays, 257).

27 The book is titled *Курляндия* in both Kazakh and Russian.

28 The Russian term expresses Nurpeisov's sense of belonging that is intrinsically connected to the land itself much better than the English term 'homeland,' and might be translated as 'the land I was born in'. However, the word родной also expresses a sentiment of kinship, thus defining the relationship between human and land not only as that of having been born and grown up there, but also as kinship bond.

проблему"[29] (Essays, 304). For Nurpeisov, the environmental crisis, is a social crisis because environmental degradation is the direct result of humanity's spiritual crisis.[30] Additionally, to him, the contemporary crisis is of global impact, particularly because the threat of war has, due to nuclear weapons, become a threat to human life itself.[31] Nurpeisov furthermore emphasises the role of the novel in particular: "роман способствует гармонизации сложной жизни современника, углублению его гуманистических чувств"[32] (286f.). Indeed, it is the writer's duty [долг] to aspire to become "не сыном своего отца, а сыном всего человечества"[33] (289). As can be seen, questions of ethics and the writer's duty to present contemporary problems to their readers, as well as the friendship between different peoples, and, indeed their joining together in their goal to safeguard their shared world are of particular importance to Nurpeisov. These ethical, social and environmental problems are foregrounded in his novel *Final Respects.*

Nurpeisov still lives today and within Kazakh literary history has become renowned as one of the greatest Kazakh writers. While he has written his novels exclusively in Kazakh, the majority of his essays were originally written in Russian, clearly showing his fluency in Russian. I will further discuss his choice to write in Kazakh after providing a short introduction to the novel itself.

[29] "The duty/obligation of a writer [...], for me, lies in revealing a social problem."
[30] See Essays, 305.
[31] See ibid., 287; 289.
[32] "The novel assists the harmonisation of our contemporary's complicated live, the intensification of his humanist feelings"
[33] "Not the son of his father, but the son of all human kind"

1.2. Thematic Introduction to *Final Respects*

Nurpeisov's novel *Final Respects* proposes a nuanced analysis of humanity's environmental impact. Jumping between the present moment and memories of the past, the story develops a poignant dissection of the multiple forces that contribute to one of the most severe environmental catastrophes in Central Asia – the desiccation of the Aral Sea. Nurpeisov's culprit is not one single person, nor one single political entity. Instead, he shows how the local disaster is the result of many different actors and how it is a change that is brought about collectively. However, he also points towards the power hierarchies that influence this collective behaviour.

Nurpeisov does not only depict the crisis of the Aral Sea - parallel to this are the protagonist Jadiger's marriage crisis with Bakisat and the crisis of his friendship with Azim. These crises do not only take place along the same timeline, but are also deeply connected to the Aral Sea. Jadiger's conflict with Azim is largely based on their different perspectives on the future of the Aral Sea. While Jadiger, the chairman of a fishing kolkhoz near the Aral, wants to save and conserve the sea, Azim, a successful scientist working at the university in Alma-Ata, dreams of complete desiccation in order to build a large city in the steppe and argues that the land that used to be covered by the sea can be used for agricultural projects. Their competition in relation to the environment is mirrored in their rivalry for Bakisat, a teacher in the fishing aul. In their student years, Azim and Bakist had wanted to get married, but Azim left her for a more career-oriented match. Bakisat then married Jadiger and, thirteen years later, when left dissatisfied with her marriage and the often months-long absence of her husband, began an affair with

Azim. While it is not entirely clear when the novel is set, there are several hints, e.g., that Jadiger was a young child during WWII and that he was married to his wife for thirteen years before she left him. Between that, the three main protagonists all spent several years studying in Alma-Ata, the capital of the Kazakh SSR. The present-day narrative is set at a time when the Aral was already visibly receding from its former coast line. Thus, the present day of the narrative is probably set somewhere between the late 60s to mid 70s.

The present day of the narrative is the day Bakisat tells Jadiger that she is leaving him and marries Azim. In shock and despair, Jadiger flees into the steppe towards the frozen sea where he agonises about his past life and his relationship with Bakisat. This is precisely the moment when the first book begins. Everything that had happened before and that had led him to that moment is related through interior (memory-)monologues.[34] Azim and Bakisat find him there late at night when they are driving away from the aul after their marriage celebrations. Suddenly, the three of them are taken into the open sea by an ice sheet that has broken loose from the shore. Ceasing a short-windowed opportunity when the ice sheet has floated close to the shore, Azim leaves the other two behind, while Jadiger sacrifices his own chance of reaching safety by first going back to the others to tell them that the ice sheet had drifted back to the shore. Bakisat, like Jadiger, sacrifices hers in order to help Jadiger who has fallen and broken through the ice with one foot. Azim reaches the aul by the next day and immediately leaves; Jadiger and Bakisat are left on the ice sheet. While Jadiger is dying, Bakisat encounters, and tries to

[34] Since much of the narrative of the first book is in second-person, even the memory of the past is reminiscent of an interior monologue. I will analyse the peculiarity of the narrative style in more detail in Chapter One.

defend them against, a lone male wolf who has also gotten stuck on the ice sheet. Before the wolf can attack Bakisat, a crack in the ice sheet separates the wolf from her. When, finally, a helicopter finds them and drops down a package with blankets and soup, Jadiger has already frozen to death. The novel ends with Bakisat, standing in the dark on the ice sheet, facing the Aral Sea, watching a little bird fly away. This bird had found shelter from the cold under Jadiger's clothes as the latter lay dying.

1.3. Kazakh Literature - In Slavic Studies and in Translation

Before I begin with my analysis, I would like to point out why I chose to engage with Kazakh literature even though I am working within Russian/Slavic Studies. In her dissertation about Russophone literature, Naomi Caffee rightly notes that the recent engagement in Slavic Studies with Central Asia and the Caucasus has mainly focused on exploring the Russian classics in the light of colonial politics and empire. To counteract this, she proposes Russophonia as a category with which Russian language literature from Central Asia and the Caucasus itself can be studied, thereby reversing the centre-periphery dynamic. A further change of focus is expressed through the nominal change from Slavic Studies to Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies in many US institutions. In my opinion, this needs to be followed by an incorporation of Eurasian writers writing in their own languages into the research of these departments. Particularly for research concerning the Soviet era and Soviet literature, the engagement with literature in languages other than Russian is paramount since there were many non-

Russian, non-Russophone writers who nonetheless wrote during the Soviet period and often, like Nurpeisov, did not identify exclusively in terms of national or ethnic belonging, but also saw themselves as Soviet citizens. The inclusion of non-Russophone writers, however, is not without its own trials, for one cannot hope to be equally fluent in so many languages. Instead, an engagement with translations is inevitable. Of course, translations themselves can be quite problematic, both theoretically and in practice. Nurpeisov's novel presents a very particular problem: Both the English and the German translations of the Kazakh novel are actually translations of the Russian translation.[35] Therefore, and due to the fact that I am not proficient in Kazakh, I will, throughout the thesis, quote directly from the Russian translation and provide English translations only in the footnotes. I am, furthermore, using an earlier edition of the Russian translation (2002), while both the English and German translations are from a later edition (2005).[36]

The first Russian translation was published in 1984 in a re-edition of Nurpeisov's trilogy *Blood and Sweat*. At first, it could not be published on its own due to censorship. Apparently, the novel did not find support in Moscow because the protagonist does not rise up against the injustices to save his aul. Nurpeisov's Kazakh publisher evaded censorship by including the novel titled *Долг* [*Duty*] in a new edition of *Blood and Sweat*, which appeared in two volumes. While the first volume includes the first two books of the trilogy, the second contained the third book of the trilogy as well as Nurpeisov's new

[35] Translations into other languages probably also often relied on the Russian translation. I am only including information about the German translation here because that is my native language and it seemed to make sense to at least have some comparison to the English translation. Indeed, the fact that the first part of the novel appeared in German already in 1988 stands out in sharp contrast to the rather recent "discovery" of Nurpeisov's novel in English.

[36] The difference in these editions can be seen partly through the addition of a new character in the 2005 edition, Mukan, a resident of the Aral Sea region, who goes to a conference about the Aral Sea where he tries to draw attention to the local environmental crisis.

novel.[37] Since then, the novel has been rewritten several times and a second part was added. In 2000, the Russian translation was renamed *Последний Долг* [*Last Duty*] and the newest version from 2017 includes revisions and additions to the previous versions of the novel and has been published in two parts as *И был день* [*And there was the day/And it was day*] and *И была ночь* [*And there was the night/And it was night*].[38] The first publication in Kazakh appeared in 1982, in 1984 the Russian translation was published, followed by the first German translation in 1988. The second part of the novel has then been included in the new German translation in 2006. Both German translations appeared under the title *Der sterbende See* [*The dying Sea/Lake*].[39] The only existing English translation was published in 2013 as *Final Respects*,[40] while the newest Russian edition (2017) does not seem to have been translated into any other languages yet. As can be seen from the German and English titles, the meaning of the original Kazakh title *Соңғы парыз* - literally *Last Duty/Obligation*, while *парыз* can also mean "fard," which is the term for "religious duty" within Islam - has been quite changed. The English title *Final Respects* is reminiscent of a funeral rite and thus emphasises the mourning over the already dead sea, while the German title gives a particular context (the sea) that is absent from the other titles. The first Russian translation had been written by Gerol'd Bel'ger, a Russian of German ancestry and Petr Krasnov, also a Russian. The newer editions, while

37 See Anastas'ev, 235.

38 The new Russian title is already used in earlier editions as the subtitles for the two parts of the novel. To a reader educated in a majoritarily Christian region, this title is reminiscent of the Bible, Gen. 1:5 "И был вечер, и было утро" [And it was evening, and it was morning.], see Bibliya-online.ru, accessed May 27, 2021, http://bibliya-online.ru/chitat-bytie-glava-1/. However, I am uncertain of whether that same connotation still holds in a majoritarily Muslim society like Kazakhstan.

39 Abdishamil Nurpeissow, *Der Sterbende See. Romandilogie*, trans. Annelore Nitschke (Berlin: Dagyeli, 2006).

40 Abdi-Jamil Nurpeisov, *Final Respects*, trans. Catherine Fitzpatrick (New York: Liberty Publishing House, 2013).

relying on earlier translations of the first part, have been written by Anatolii Kim, a Russophone Korean-Kazakh writer. Kim himself emphasised that in his translation he tried to keep the cultural expression of Kazakh identity intact and to import it into the Russian text.[41] The text often uses Kazakh expressions and other Kazakh words and keeps Kazakh forms of address, such as the "-aga" suffix, which is attached to names as a form of respect. Throughout the text, Kazakh expressions like ойбай, апырай and айналайын,[42] as well as socio-political titles like баскарма (chairperson) and аксакал (village elder), as well as family-relation words like женге (sister-in-law) are used in their Russian spelling. These words also appear in the first translation by Bel'ger. While the first edition of *Долг* (duty/obligation), published together with a re-edition of *Blood and Sweat* includes a short explanatory dictionary at the end, where Kazakh expressions and words are explained, there are almost no footnotes that explain Kazakh words in the 2002 edition. The footnotes that do exist mainly explain words which are only used once in the text, while the more often appearing expressions and socio-political titles are not explained at all.[43]

There is, however, one particular difference that is interesting, which I want to show in one example by juxtaposing the two Russian versions with the Kazakh text:

41 See Viacheslav Ogrysko, "Anatolii Kim. Ne ostavat'sia v plenu svoei izvestnosti," *Literaturnaia Rocciia*, no 36 (2018), https://litrossia.ru/item/anatolij-kim-ne-ostavatsja-v-plenu-svoej-izvestnosti-intervju/.

42 I am taking the definition of these Kazakh terms from the first Russian translation that was published together with *Blood and Sweat* and included a short, explanatory dictionary: "ойбай-ау! - восклицание, выражающее удивление, обиду, недоумение" [exclamation expressing astonishment, offence, bewilderment]; "Апыа-ай! - возглас удивления, сомнения" [exclamation of astonishment, doubt]; "Айналаин-ау - ласковое обращение к младшему" [affectionate address towards one's junior]. See Abdizhamil Nurpeisov, *Krov' i Pot. Tom 2* (Alma-Ata: Zhazushy, 1984), 601-604, http://kazneb.kz/bookView/view/?brId=1160807&lang=kk.

43 Due to time limitations I was not able to closely compare the translations. Kim's translation of the first book, however in part based on the earlier translation.

Скорпион [Scorpion] ты, а не человек... Уходи! [...] Народ прозвал меня **Сары-Шая** [Sary Shaia], но никак не **Скорпионом** [Scorpion]. (Bel'ger, 585)[44]

У, **сары шаян** [Sary Shaian]!... Убирайся к черту! [...] Народ прозвал меня **Сары Шая** [Sary Shaia], но никак не **сары шаян, скорпион** [Sary Shaian, scorpion]. (Kim, 226)[45]

Өй, **Сар-ы шаян** [Sary Shaian]. [...] Жаман ағаңды бұл халық **"Сары Шая"** [Sary Shaia] дейтін, сен **"Сары Шаян"** [Sary Shaian] дедің бе? (Kazakh, 238)[46]

Even without knowing Kazakh, there are a couple of things that are obvious. Firstly, that the first Kazakh sentence "Өй, Сар-ы шаян" [Oy Sary Shaian] is much shorter than both Russian translations. Secondly, the main part of the sentence is the insult "Сар-ы шаян," a play with the name of the character, Sary Shaia (Сары Шая, same spelling in Russian and in Kazakh, although Bel'ger adds a hyphen) which is turned into Sary Shaia**n**. The Kazakh "шаян," as both translations make clear, means scorpion. Sary itself actually means yellow in Kazakh. In Kazakh it is, of course, not necessary to explain this word play, while the Russian translation can either let out the word play in favour of the meaning (Bel'ger's translation) or maintain it (Kim). In Kim's translation, the effect of the sound of the Kazakh words "Шая" / "шаян" is kept, while the translation of the word itself is given through an explanation in Sary Shaia's answer to Jadiger. In Kim's translation there is thus a certain amount of self-reference within the translation, i.e. it is drawn attention to the fact that the text is a translation. Furthermore, Kim's translation points towards the reason why Jadiger imagines his uncle as scorpion - through the

44 See ibid. Since I am mainly interested in the different ways of translating a Kazakh word-play, I am not providing detailed translations here.

45 Abdizhamil Nurpeisov, *Poslendii Dolg: Roman* (Moskva: RIK "Kultura", 2002), http://kazneb.kz/bookView/view/?brId=1169953&lang=ru.

46 Abdizhamil Nurpeisov, *Songy Paryz* (Almaty: Zhazushy, 1999), http://kazneb.kz/bookView/view/?brId=1163193&lang=kk.

closeness of the name - while also keeping Jadiger's creative use of language intact.[47]

The problem of translation takes on a somewhat different shape in the Central Asian context. Within the European tradition, at least since Friedrich Schleiermacher, there have been many arguments about the difference between a foreignising or domesticating translation, i.e. one that either keeps the cultural foreignness of the text and marks the cultural difference through the translation, or one that seeks to eradicate that foreignness so that the translation does not seem like a translation. Translations that do not primarily work with the original text, i.e. bible translations which did not use the ancient Greek or Hebrew text but translated from Latin into German, English, etc., seem like a relic of the past. That a translator might not know the language of the original seems outright impossible, and even incomplete knowledge is heavily criticised as can be seen in the discussion about Deborah Smith's 2015 translation of Han Kang's 채식주의자 (*Chaesikjuuija* [2007], English title: *The Vegetarian*).[48] In a recent translation of Hamid Ismailov's *Jinlar basmi yoxud katta o'yin* (2016, transl. as *The Devil's Dance* [2018],[49] the translation leaves out the second part of the Uzbek title "or the Great

47 Apparently, сарышаян (saryshaian, yellow scorpion) is also just a word for a specific (yellow) scorpion: "Bir kunde zheti aieldi saryshaian shaqqan," Jasqazaq.kz, Feburary 05, 2020, https://jasqazaq.kz/2020/02/05/bir-kynde-zheti-ajeldi-saryshayan-shakhkhan/.

48 At the time of translation, Smith had studied Korean for only some years and despite the fact that the Korean author approved of the translation there were many critiques, both from Korean academics, but strangely so also from e.g. an English-language critic who did not speak Korean himself but attempted to analyse the English translation for inconsistencies. Maybe the uproar was particularly loud because of the joint International Booker prize that author and translator were awarded with. Of course, the fact that a young translator took on the task of Han Kang's novel speaks to the broader problem of cross-cultural translation, namely the fact that there are less opportunities and also less proficient translators for non-European languages, and particularly, for Central Asian languages.

49 The translation was published by Tilted Axis, a publisher for translations founded by Deborah Smith with the money she won in the International Booker Prize, a fact that is quite telling, since despite the fact that Ismailov is already a more established writer, for translation from his Uzbek novels he still depends on 'alternative' publishers who are willing to take such risks.

Game"[50]) by Donald Reyfield, the translator explains in the afterword why and how he translated the text "from an initial position of deplorable ignorance," knowing only "little Turkish and less Farsi" (he specialises in Russian and Georgian). What is of importance here is the still-existing problem that there are few experts who can translate from Central Asian languages into European ones, but also that there are simply not enough publishers who are willing to pay for such work. In this light, it is not surprising that Nurpeisov's novels were translated into English and German not directly from Kazakh, but from the Russian translation.

However, the problem is not merely one of lack of competence in Central Asian languages, a further obstacle is the status of Central Asian languages themselves. During the Soviet era, policy in Central Asia shifted between encouraging the teaching of national languages and their repression. While under Lenin there were many efforts to support national languages and to teach national languages in schools, Stalin reversed these measures drastically and rather sought to eradicate languages other than Russian within the Soviet Union.[51] After Stalinism, there was a slow revival of national languages. In an interview titled "Будить в человеке совесть" (To awaken conscience in people) in

[50] For lack of language knowledge I used two different translation engines: Yandex (Uzbek-Russian) and Google (Uzbek-English), they both gave the same translation of *yoxud katta o'yin*. Iandeks Perevodchik, accessed May 27, 2021, https://translate.yandex.ru/?lang=uz-ru&text=Jinlar%20basmi%20yoxud%20katta%20o%27yin. Google Translate, accessed May 27, 2021, https://translate.google.de/?sl=auto&tl=en&text=Jinlar%20basmi%20yoxud%20katta%20o%27yin&op=translate. Here, the Uzbek indication that the novel is about the Great Game (i.e. the struggle over power in Central Asia between the Russian and the British empires), a detail that is left out in the translation, already sets the historical scope of the narrative.

[51] Within Central Asia (and particularly Kazakhstan) this is not only true of the Central Asian languages, but also of the languages of other minorities, either in their own republics (e.g. Ukrainian), but also of those who where deported to Central Asia, e.g. the Korean diaspora who was forbidden to teach Korean to their children. This topic is also taken up by Nurpeisov translator and Kazakh-Korean writer Anatolii Kim in his own short stories.

1988, Nurpeisov talks about how happy it makes him to see Kazakh language kindergartens or schools in Kazakhstan and he ascribes this development to the impact of glasnost and perestroika.[52] This points to both the new effort of propagating the Kazakh language, as well as to the damage that had been done in the previous decades. In this context, Nurpeisov's choice to write his novels in Kazakh needs to be seen as literary resistance against the hegemony of the Russian language, for he insists through his novels, that the Kazakh language itself is capable of producing great literature. While the status of the Kazakh language has certainly changed a lot since independence, the continued universality of the Russian language in the region is attested by the fact that until 2020 an international bestseller, such as the Harry Potter series, was available only in Russian because it simply had not been translated into Kazakh.[53]

Returning to the Soviet era, translators of Central Asian literature largely depended on подстрочники [podstrochniki],[54] i.e., word-for-word or interlinear translations of the texts as Nurpeisov points out in his essay "Проблемы художественного перевода" (Problems of literary translation, 1977). Interestingly, he does not consider the fact that Russian translators need interlinear translations to be the

[52] See Essays, 314.

[53] The first book was presented February 2020, and the translation of the series was announced to be completed in the following two years; see "Knigi 'Garri Potter i filosofskii kamen" pereveli na kazakhskii iazyk," Telekanal Almaty, February 4, 2020, video, 1:23, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-SHAMLaSPM. Even the fact that the Kazakh 'Harry' was written as Хәрри and not as Гарри (like the Russian) was subject of debate, as Kazakh author Zira Naurzbaeva points out in a video on her Youtube channel. She argues that the translation as Хәрри should even be seen as decolonising, since the import of European culture has so often happened through Russia and the Russian language (2:32-3:33). Zira Naurzbaeva, "Pochemu perevod Harry Potter na kazakhskii iazyk eto akt dekolonizatsii," January 1, 2021, video, 7:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPqm_dtreFk.

[54] As Katya Hokanson has pointed out to me, the use of podstrochniki was a common practice Russian translators used when translating languages they were not fluent in. Thus, this is not only a Russian-Central Asian phenomenon.

main problem. Rather, he emphasises his respect for the Russian writer Vasilii Belov who translated the Kazakh writer Abish Kekilbayev's "Хатынгольская Баллада" (Khatyngol'skaia Ballada) from Bel'ger's word-for-word translation and praises the quality of his translation.[55] What he mostly criticises are "властные переводы" [vlastnye perevody], which can be translated as 'authoritarian translations'. Nurpeisov accuses the proponents of this method of not cherishing the original work. He rejects the idea that the translation should be seen as entirely the translator's work. He is particularly opposed to E. Sergeev's opinion that the translator has the right to reshape and change the text to their liking. Furthermore, he points out that it is precisely "национальные литературы" (national literatures) that are in need of good interlinear translations. According to Nurpeisov, part of the problem is that these interlinear translations are sometimes not very good. However, he also emphasises that the work of writing them is neither highly esteemed, nor well-paid.[56] The differentiation between national literatures and Russian literature that Nurpeisov makes also marks the hierarchy between the different languages. This hierarchy is expressed through the fact that there are translators who translate national literatures without knowing the national languages themselves, while those writers and translators who have translated Russian classics into their national languages have always been very proficient in both Russian and their national languages. In contrast to this, national languages need to be first made available to the Russian translator through the mediation of the interlinear translation. This hierarchy is made doubly problematic through the negligent way in which those translators who Nurpeisov

[55] See Essays, 271.
[56] See ibid., 267.

criticises treat other literatures. What maybe stands out the most is that the translators are judging other literatures by their interlinear translations. Nurpeisov, who is quite rightly outraged at this audacity, draws attention to this power dynamic that depreciates non-Russophone Soviet literature:

> [П]ри переводе вопрос должен стоять не о том, как хочет того переводчик, проявив 'властный' метод в обращении с оригиналом, а о том, как и каким образом донести лучше и без искажения до другого читателя, прежде всего, неповторимый облик национального писателя, **как сохранить в неприкосновенности его самобытные, индивидуальные черты**? А по мнению Ершова и Сергеева, у писателей национальных литератур вроде бы нет и не бывает самобытных и индивидуальных черт в творчестве.[57] (272)

As Nurpeisov's criticism shows, he was deeply aware of the problems of translation, particularly for national languages and he perceived the question of translation to be of paramount importance. To him, the choice of the translator was of importance, as well as the active engagement of the author with the translator and his work. This was not only connected to translation in general, but particularly to translations from the national languages:

> Каждый уважающий себя национальный писатель должен знать, намереваясь переводиться на русский язык, кому он доверяет судьбу своего произведения. Поэтому следует самому подбирать переводчика из числа близких себе по духу писателей.[58] (277)

[57] "Concerning translations, the question should not be about how the translator wants it to be, manifesting an 'authoritative' method in their treatment of the original, but about how, and in which way to better, and without distortion, carry to the other reader, first of all, the unique character of the national writer; **how to leave his original, individual traits untouched.** According to Ershov and Sergeev, the writers of national literatures apparently do not, and cannot, have original and individual traits in their creative work."

[58] "Every self-respecting national writer should know, when intending to be translated into Russian, to whom he entrusts the fate of his work. Therefore, one ought to select the translator oneself out of a number of writers who are close to oneself in spirit."

Similar to Nurpeisov's own sense of personal duty as a writer, which is reflected in his choice to write about the Aral Sea crisis, it is also the duty of the national writer to ensure the quality of the Russian translation. Therefore, Nurpeisov chose his translators very carefully and was particularly keen on having Anatolii Kim translate the new editions. He actually had to ask him several times personally to translate the novel and in the end was very happy with Kim's work, as Kim relates in an interview in 2018.[59]

1.4. Methodology and Outline

There are two facts that strongly limit my current inquiry. Relatively little secondary literature exists in Russian about Nurpeisov, and English research is even more scarce. Since I am not fluent in Kazakh, it is impossible for me to analyse the Kazakh-language text of the novel, nor can I access any Kazakh-language research on Nurpeisov. Therefore, my analysis will in large part depend on a close engagement with the Russian translation, but I will also draw on historical and socio-political research about the Soviet modernisation campaign in Central Asia and Kazakh history. Another important source are Nurpeisov's essays.

My analysis draws on the concept of Intersectionality as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). What Crenshaw drew attention to, is that different forms of oppression intersect, meaning they cannot be analysed in isolation but need to be seen in their context. When different forms of oppression (e.g. racism and sexism) intertwine, their

[59] See Ogrysko.

dynamic also changes. In the context of Nurpeisov and his novel, there is not only the memory of a colonial relationship between the Tsarist empire and the Kazakh nomads, but also the colonial relationship between the Soviet state and the first autonomous, then full-union, republics of Central Asia. In addition to this, gender inequalities, both within nomadic and sedentary Muslim societies, as well as those that existed within Soviet society, need to be taken into account. Within the Russo-Soviet context this means, that discrimination on the basis of gender is different for (white) Russian women than it is for (non-white) non-Russian (e.g., Kazakh) women, who are not only impacted by the effects of patriarchy, but also by the effects of the hegemony of the Russian culture. This is further intensified through the religious difference that starkly contrasts Soviet atheism with Central Asian Islam. In addition, oppression in Central Asia was heavily influenced by the perceived 'backwardness' of nomadism. This hierarchy presupposed the Marxist theory that the 'natural' progress of societies had a clear line of development and that some forms of life were less advanced than others. According to this theory of human progress, the nomadic peoples where seen to be at a lower stage of development in comparison to sedentary peoples. Therefore, the Bolsheviks endeavoured to speed up the process of development into a more advanced society through forced settlement and collectivisation.[60] As I have explained in the introduction, Nurpeisov himself was highly influenced by the Soviet depiction of nomadism as a sign of 'backwardness'. Thus, sovietisation of the Kazakhs who were born and raised under Soviet rule is of particular importance. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is helpful in drawing attention to the

[60] See e.g. Northrop, 19.

multifaceted interconnected social hierarchies and oppressions. Interestingly, Nurpeisov's novel performs precisely an analysis of several different social hierarchies and can thus be said to already provide an intersectional criticism both through the content of *Final Respects*, as well as through the way in which the novel is written. In my analysis, I will pay particular attention to the way in which Nurpeisov presents and narrates social hierarchies and inequities.

In my analysis of the novel, I will pay particular attention to the narrative voice and the narrative style of the novel, drawing on Mieke Bal's *Narratology*. Part of my focus will be on distinguishing the narrator from the focalizer**.** This term was first coined by Gerard Genette, and has later been taken up by Mieke Bal. The term of focalizer expresses the difference "between the vision and what is seen, perceived" (133). What this means is that e.g., the third-person narrative presents the point of view of Jadiger. Therefore, the narrative is focalised through him instead of a 'neutral' narrative voice. Thus, while a character might not be the direct narrator of the scene, the scene can nonetheless be depicted through their point of view, displaying their opinions. Because my interpretation of the novel relies on a detailed analysis of narrative style and narrative voice, I present this analysis in Chapter One. There, I argue that the mixture of first-, second-, and third-person narrators presents many different points of view simultaneously. Through this multivocality, Nurpeisov presents both Kazakhs themselves, as well as their culture, traditions and opinions as non-monolithic. Additionally, the constant shift between different narrative voices presents the narrative content of the novel stylistically, while different focalisations represent even those who

are not directly given voice in the novel itself. This element of the narrative will be of particular importance for my textual interpretations in both Chapter Two and Three.

In Chapter Two I focus more on the narrative content, particularly on different opinions regarding women, the environment, Kazakh culture and the Soviet government. I argue that the novel presents a rich social fabric of Soviet Kazakhs and analyse how the main characters and their opinions make visible the hierarchy between the Russian centre and the Kazakh periphery. I argue that this is achieved particularly through the depiction of Azim and Jadiger and through an analysis of internalised racism, internalised imperialism and sovietisation. In this chapter, I also pay attention to the way in which women are both depicted and imagined and argue that they are presented from many different points of view which provide a nuanced analysis of women's lives. This is achieved through the multivocal description of different kinds of femininity that presents neither women, nor Kazakh tradition as monolithic.[61] I further discuss women's social status more in general, both in the pre-Soviet era and under Soviet rule in order to contextualise the depiction of women in the novel.

Continuing issues of ethnicity, environmentalism and gender-equality, Chapter Three presents an analysis of the diverse Kazakh environmental strategies the novel depicts, both intra-textually, as well as extra-textually. Here, I first analyse active Kazakh environmentalist strategies, as well as discussions of environmental issues between characters in the novel itself. My largest section in this chapter deals with the general

[61] As regards my feminist criticism of the novel, I'd like to acknowledge that an analysis cannot be altogether disconnected from the personal perspective of the analyser, for "[e]motions are embodied and relational." See Richard Twine, "Intersectional Disgust? Animals and (eco)feminism," *Feminism & Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010), 398.

depiction of women and nature, which analyses the ways in which they are paralleled in the narrative. Furthermore, several parallels are drawn directly between Bakisat and the Aral Sea, wich is established through their relationships to both Jadiger, as well as Azim. I argue that the narrative thereby establishes a connection between the exploitation of nature and women. Thus, the novel juxtaposes women's oppression to environmental exploitation. Nonetheless, the novel also presents misogynistic opinions and often essentialises women through negative characteristics and therefore does not directly present an ecofeminist analysis. Rather, it continues to describe a rich, multivocal analysis of the Aral Sea crisis that cannot be reduced to any one succinct analysis. Instead, the environmental argument that is presented in Chapter Three reflects both the multivocal narrative style, as well as the rich social fabric I present in Chapters One and Two.

II. NARRATIVE VOICE AND FOCALISATION

2.1. Narrative Voice, Duty and Obligation

One element of Nurpeisov's philosophy is lost in the titular translations of both German and English: the ethical dimension that is conferred through the meaning of duty/obligation that the Kazakh [парыз, paryz] as well as the Russian translation [долг] emphasise. As can be seen from my discussion of Nurpeisov and his opinion about a writer's role in the world, this ethical aspect is quite important. The Russian critic Leonard Terakopian interprets the ethical dimension of the novel as a reference towards the individual duty/obligation (долг) of the main protagonists Jadiger, Azim and Bakisat. For him, all three of them are partly to blame for the Aral Sea crisis. Indeed, "“Последний долг” — это цивилизация перед лицом экологии,"[62] argues Terakopian pointing towards a collective guilt. He not only ascribes guilt to the three protagonists, but also points toward the guilt of the other fishermen as well as the government officials in the Big House ("Большой Дом" [Bol'shoi Dom][63]). In his reading, Jadiger symbolises the entirety of the Kazakh people, who die, whilst Azim, "the academic," can save himself. It is, in fact, the local people who are impacted the most by the crisis: "Спрос со всех, а расплачиваться Жадигеру. Ему не привыкать, он — народ."[64] Nonetheless, Jadiger should not be directly identified with the people because that would risks

62 "Final Respects - civilisation in the face of ecology." Leonid Terakopian, "Leonid Terakopian o kn. Abdizhamila Nurpeisova 'Poslednii Dolg'," *Oktiabr'*, no. 11 (2001), https://magazines.gorky.media/october/2001/11/leonid-terakopyan-o-kn-abdizhamila-nurpeisova-poslednij-dolg.html.

63 This refers to the highest political bureau in the Kazakh SSR in Alma-Ata.

64 "It is a demand for all, but Jadiger has to pay. He can't get used to it. He is the people."

essentialising and homogenising the people through identification with Jadiger. Not only Jadiger is Kazakh, so are Azim and Bakisat as well as almost every character in the novel. The fact that the female character Bakisat is the only one who survives both morally and physically points to a different interpretation. Jadiger actually dies physically, but not morally because instead of running off the ice alone, he came back for the others. Azim dies in moral terms even though he survives because he only cares about saving himself. When he finally reaches the aul the next morning, he immediately gets on one of the planes which had been sent to look for them in order to never return to the aul. Whether Bakisat will survive is not entirely clear. Nonetheless, she is still alive, she helped Jadiger after his fall and then she tried to keep him warm and even when the helicopter drops down blankets and some hot beverage, she tries to give it to Jadiger first - only to realise that he has already passed away.

Not only is she the lone survivor, throughout the novel she is represented mostly through the eyes of others, mainly Jadiger. While she certainly was mistaken in Azim, she can hardly be blamed for leaving her husband, Jadiger, for the love of her youth, particularly after a brutal scene in which Jadiger beats her up while he is drunk. He does so because he suspects her of cheating on him with Azim and because he is sexually frustrated since she is evading intercourse with him. Therefore, Bakisat is depicted as suffering in an unhappy marriage only to fall for a mirage of love and luxury that Azim represents. Similarly to the Aral Sea in the novel, she is the object of conflict between Azim and Jadiger. Thus, her direct culpability can be called into question through an analysis of how women and nature, and in particular, Bakisat and the Aral are paralleled

in the novel. I will analyse this particular question in more detail in Chapter Three. At first, however, it is necessary to present the narrative structure of the novel in more detail, which I will then, in Chapter Two, connect to the general context within which the novel is written: Soviet Kazakhstan. I will situate the narrative structure in relation to plot and content but also highlight the novel's critical lens on Soviet Kazakhstan on the one hand, and the depiction of women on the other. Because every ethical and/or philosophical interpretation needs to take into account the specificities of narrative stylistics in order to fully understand how the text itself produces an ethical understanding of the situation, I will begin my analysis with a detailed description of the narrative voice(s) in the novel.

2.2. Part One: И был день - And It Was Day

Throughout the novel the narrative voice oscillates between third-, second-, and in the second part of the book, even first-person narrators (он/она [he/she], ты [you, singular, informal], я [I]). The first book begins its first sentence in third-person only to morph into a second-person narrator already on the very first page. Because the narrative focus constantly changes it is impossible to determine one single interpretation of meaning. Thus, the second-person narration could be taken to mean several different things - the equation of the reader with the character, the interior monologue of the character with himself, a narrative voice that is directly talking to the character, or a narrative voice that addresses the reader directly. Thus, the narrative style in fact breaks the clear distinction between intra-textual and extra-textual layers of meaning. Through the second-person

narrative, the narrator and/or focalizer[65] establishes a direct contact between itself and the reader. Terakopian's equation of Jadiger to the Kazakh people themselves makes sense insofar as the direct address stresses the fact that this could be anyone, any person could be Jadiger, standing on an ice sheet, contemplating his life. As Nurpeisov writes in one of his essays about the Kyrgyz writer Chingis Aitmatov and his vivid depiction of an old man, Momun, in his novel *Белый Пароход* (1970, transl. as *The White Ship* 1972), the characterisation of Momun encompasses an entire type of person, one that he, i.e. Nurpeisov, himself has encountered many times in old men in auls (see Essays, 20). Jadiger is also such a social type. This is emphasised through the way in which second-person and third-person narrative are connected to each other. The narrative begins with the third-person narrative: "Высокий, темноликий **человек** [...] **Он** смотрел [...]"[66] (5). The change into the second-person happens not suddenly, but gradually:

"Неровные, тяжкие **следы** усталого человека... Он сам не знал почему, но **вид их** вызывал в нем глухую тоску. **Было в них** что-то **несуразное**, не в ладу со всем окружающим, - что они напоминали, **почему** тревожили? **Постой**... да не саму ли жизнь **твою**... Не эта ли **несуразность твоя** все тринадцать лет угнетала Бакизат?"[67] (ibid.).

Here we can trace the different words that, although they precede the second-person narrative, already point towards the transformation from the first-person narrative

[65] As referred to in the introduction, what I mean with focalizer is that the third-person narrative presents the point of view of Jadiger, thus the narrative is focalised through him instead of a 'neutral' narrative voice. See above, 22.

[66] "A tall, dark-faced **person** [...] **He** looks [...]". The Kazakh text uses "қара," which means "black" instead of "dark-faced."

[67] "The uneven, grave **footsteps** of a tired person... He himself did not know why, but **their sight** evoked in him a deep melancholy. **There was in them** something **awkward**, something not in harmony with everything else around, - what did they remind of, **why** were they disturbing? **Wait**... wasn't it **your** life itself... Wasn't it your **awkwardness** that all these thirteen years had oppressed Bakisat?"

through Jadiger as focalizer into the second-person narrative. The third-person pronoun "he" is used to describe the impression that his own footsteps have on Jadiger. In the previous sentence they are described as "uneven, grave footsteps of a tired person," which already represents Jadiger's point of view, he has become the focalizer: The footsteps are not described as they are, but as Jadiger perceives them. The third-person narrative continues to reflect on the footsteps: "their sight," "there was in them something **awkward**." This awkwardness is also a self-description, which becomes clear later on. When the narrator asks, " - what did they remind of, why were they disturbing?" The hyphen that sets this question apart from the first part of the sentence further emphasises Jadiger as focalizer and presages the change towards an interior monologue, which is realised through the next sentence ("Wait... wasn't it your life itself..."). Then, the second-person narrative picks up the term "awkward" from the third-person narrative and thus draws a lexical connection between the two: Wasn't it your **awkwardness** that all these thirteen years had oppressed Bakisat?"

Throughout the narrative, these gradual changes from third-person to second-person happen repeatedly. The second "subchapter," set apart from the first only by asterisks (***), begins again with "Высокий, темноликий человек"[68] (12) in third-person narrative and again morphs in the following sentences into the second-person perspective. But the narrative style does not only change back to third-person in the beginning of new sections (and not all new sections begin in third-person), it also occurs within one paragraph, unexpectedly from one sentence to the next. Cinematographically

[68] "A tall, dark-faced person."

speaking, these third-person narratives present a point of view from above. They zoom out of the scene in order to depict the image of a lonely person in the vast emptiness of the steppe, the frozen sea and the fresh snow which makes his footsteps so clearly visible. Often, the switch to the third-person narrative is accompanied by the words "Высокий, темноликий человек" or other variants (сутулый, мужчина[69]) that directly mark not only Jadiger's appearance, but function as lexical markers of the present day narrative.

The alternation between different narrative perspectives sometimes seems to express the voice of the narrator talking to the character: "Чему ты усмехаешься? Следам своим? Или себе самому?"[70] (13). This is also implied in the direct address towards Jadiger as "дружок" [druzhok]: "сегодня [следы] задевают и твое самолюбие, **дружок**, и ты не знаешь, на ком выместить свою ярость?"[71] (13 f.). At the same time, the play between the narrative styles also reflects Jadiger's emotions and his own alienation from himself. "Ну и подумай, станет ли человек в здравом уме допускать мысль, что возможно отделить свои следы от себя самого, а себя от следов?"[72] (14).

While the second-person narrative is connected to Jadiger's memories, there are also several scenes where the narrator shifts into a position of omniscience in order to add storylines about other, more secondary, characters such as the chauffeur Kozhban, the old fishermen Koshen and the protagonist's uncle Sary Shaia. Through these additional plotlines, the narrative voice itself seems to be omniscient. While Jadiger certainly has

69 "hunched," "man".
70 "What are you laughing about? Your footsteps? Or yourself?"
71 "Today [the footsteps] offend your self-esteem, friend, and you don't know on whom to take out your wrath."
72 "Just think, does a person in their right mind allow the thought that it is possible to seperate their footsteps from themselves, and themselves from their footsteps?"

heard them, the stories themselves give very detailed information, information too detailed for the protagonist to know about them, thus disconnecting the narrative of the subplot from the protagonist - not through narrative style, but through content and focalisation. This sense of omniscience does not only appear in the scenes of secondary characters but is also sometimes betrayed in the second-person narrative itself, thereby shedding doubt on the idea that the narrative is merely Jadiger's conversation with himself. When he visits the fishermen who spend most of the year far away from their families working for the fishing kolkhoz (farming collective), the narrative voice says: "**И ты, и все** вокруг казана почувствовали некоторое облегчение."[73] (36). Although it is possible to interpret this as Jadiger's point of view, the narrative voice is very determined and sure about its statements without giving any reason as to why. There is no notice of, for instance, how this "relief" was expressed on the faces of the fishermen, thus pointing to the narrators omniscience. This, in fact, means that the second-person narrative is not focalised through Jadiger.

The narrative is not only distinguished through its multivocality, but also through the dissonance between present and past selves which alienates the narrative voice from the protagonist. This gives the impression that either someone else is talking to Jadiger or that he is talking to himself while disassociating from himself through the second-person address, experiencing himself simultaneously as himself but also as 'other': "Как сейчас кажется, ты в тот миг даже не осознавал, на каком свете находишься и, вообще, существуешь ли ты или нет в этом мире."[74] (39). Here, the narrator is observing

[73] "**And you, and everyone** around the cooking pot sensed some sort of relief."
[74] "As it seems now, in that moment, you didn't even realise in which universe you are, nor whether or not

Jadiger's moods and feelings and can analyse those memories, but the Jadiger of the past is neither aware of where he is nor of whether he exists at all. This disconnection is intensified through the second-person narration which seems to establish past and present Jadiger as different entities. This disconnection is mirrored in the description of the past Jadiger and his process of decision-making:

> "Если даже и существуешь, то будто **некая** накатившая откуда-то сторонняя **сила**, лишив тебя воли твоей, властно захватила тебя. И **мнится теперь**, что не эта ли странная сила и вложила в твои уста слова, о которых ты до этого не помышлял ни сном ни духом."[75] (ibid.).

Similarly to the narrative style, which plays with the uncertainty of 'Who is speaking?', Jadiger's memory of the moment when he made the decision to break his promise to Bakisat (that he would return the next day) and instead stays with the fishermen for the rest of the fishing season is depicted less as his own decision as the influence of a "strange force that put into **your** mouth the words." Here the disassociation is doubled - it exists both between past and present and between the self and what is perceived as outer influence.

Jadiger's disassociation from his own decision-making process is further complicated by one particular scene where Jadiger recounts feeling that he cannot control his own behaviour anymore. In this scene, the fishermen are testing the ice on the river to see if they can cross it with their trucks to get to the other side, where they know the fish

you exit at all in this world."

75 "And even if you exist, then it seemed as though **some sort of** outside **force**, sweeping over you from somewhere, depriving you of your willpower, had powerfully seized you. And **it seems now** - wasn't it this strange force that put into your mouth the words which you, before this, did not even dream about uttering."

are sheltered under the young ice. These are indeed the most important days for fishing, hence the urgency. While the other kolkhoz groups have decided to wait another day, not trusting the ice to hold, Jadiger is undecided as to what he should do. Here, the narrative voice stresses that Jadiger is no longer in control over his own actions: "появилось вдруг ощущение: с этой минуты каждым твоим шагом, каждым твоим поступком **управляет кто-то извне**, **кто-то неведомый властно диктует** тебе свою волю"[76] (57). The force determining his behaviour is described as "**посторонний**" [alien] (ibid.). His decision-making process, while depicted as being dictated from outside, is simultaneously also happening within: "где-то **в глубине души** твоей, неудержимо разрастаясь, набирала силу какая-то необузданная упрямая и дикая решимость"[77] (58). This contrast is emphasised even more so on the next page:

> Все остальное пошло так, словно **кто-то другой, а не ты** все это делал; будто та необузданная **сила, проснувшаяся в душе, неподвластная тебе** самому, как вихрь, **вырвалась** на волю и распоряжалась теперь **как хотела, никого не спрашивая и никому не давая опомниться.**[78] (59)

The conflict of what happens within and what he experiences as a force from outside is solved through the simultaneousness of inside and outside. The narrative voice provides a detailed account of the process of decision-making, a process that is neither necessarily

[76] "Suddenly appeared the sensation: from this minute, each of your steps, each of your actions is governed by someone outside of you, someone unknown, domineeringly, is dictating you their will."

[77] "Somewhere in the depths of your soul, irrepressibly growing, some sort of ungovernable, stubborn and wild resolution was gathering force."

[78] "The rest happened as though **someone else and not you** was doing everything; as though this irrepressible **force** that **had woken in your soul**, **uncontrollable for you**, like a whirlwind, was **breaking** free and taking charge now **however it wanted, not asking anyone and not allowing anyone to come to their senses**."

logical nor fully verbally describable. It happens within, but at the same time is so incomprehensible, even to oneself, that it becomes impossible to tell where the decision is actually made.

2.3. Part Two: И была ночь - And It Was Night

The second part, "И была ночь" [And it was night] depicts the present time as well as memories of the past through Bakisat, Azim, Jadiger and a male wolf, as well as the pilot who comes in search of them. Azim and Bakisat are presented through first-, second-, and third-person narrative, while the wolf and the pilot are only represented through third-person narrative. Jadiger is described through second-person and third-person narrative. Like the first part, the second part also begins with a third-person narrative, which is, however, not focalised through one of the protagonists. It begins with the storm ("буря") that rises over the steppe and reaches the sea. From out of the darkness the moon appears and the cry of a woman is heard. The narrative voice is disconnected from the two humans, Azim and Bakisat, who are huddled together below. This is emphasised through the incomplete knowledge of the narrator-focalizer[79]: "**Неизвестно**, заметил ли Азим все это [the wind around them etc.]"[80] (237). Here, the narrative voice is positioned as an observer who does not have access to Azim's point of view, producing the effect that it almost seems as though the narrator is nature itself. The third-person narrative then shifts and begins to focalise the events through Bakisat's perspective, depicting her emotions

[79] The narrator is the focalizer.
[80] "It is unknown whether Azim noticed any of this"

and thoughts as she sees a mysterious dark figure in the storm: "**Бакизат** была в ужасе. Нет, это не шаман. И не зверь."[81] (238). From this third-person Bakisat focalisation, the narrative then changes into second-person.

As in the first part with Jadiger, Bakisat's second-person narration is marked through a disassociation from herself which, in her case, is expressed through self-hatred and reproach. This is particularly marked in one scene, where the third-person narrative morphs into the second-person narrative:

> Едва сдерживая накипающие слезы, **она** думала о своей несчастной женской доле. Какие только джигиты[82], тщетно добивалсиь **ее** благосклонности. И вот... во-т как горькая насмешка, как расплата за гордыню - достался **ей** этот... Однако, как ни суди, как ни строй из себя гордую недотрогу, но коли уж **ты** родилась женщиной, то женская **твоя** натура рано или поздно проявится, и **ты** окажешься не лучше всякой заурядной аульной бабы. Иначе как понимать то, что и **ты**, **бесстыжая, бесстыжая**, бывало, места себе не находила [...] пока не сходилась в жаркой постели с грубо скроенным дюжим мужчиной.[83] (238f.)

While the third-person narrative at first focuses on the suffering itself, referring to "her miserable woman's lot", describing her misery in relation to gender and thus almost pointing towards a more structural rather than personal misfortune, it soon switches

[81] "Bakisat was horrified. No, this is not a shaman. And not an animal."

[82] Dzhigit is a term traditionally referring to skilled horsemen in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It has also been taken up in Russian literature to describe those peoples and has therefore become a well-known Russian word. Here, it is, of course, no longer referring to men's horse-riding abilities but still carries the same positive connotation of someone (male) who is admirable.

[83] "Barely holding in the swelling tears, **she** thought about her miserable woman's lot. What sort of dzhigits did not try to gain **her** favour in vain. And this... thi-s, like a bitter mockery, like a penalty for pride - **she** had gotten this one... Yet, despite how [you] judge, how [you] make of yourself a proud untouchable, but if **you** were already born a woman, then **your** womanly nature sooner or later reveals itself, and **you** turn out to be no better than any ordinary aul-woman. How else to understand that **you, shameless, shameless**, used to not know what to do with yourself [...] until you didn't get together with the crudely made stout man in the hot bed."

towards a personal description of the problem, depicting her fate as the payment for her pride. The second-person narrative takes up both of these thoughts, even highlighting them. In a rather essentialising self-denunciation of womanhood, she recounts how she had been eager for physical contact after her husband had just returned from a week- or month-long stay with the fishermen. The repetition of "shameless" marks both her loathing for Jadiger as well as her mortification at the memory of those moments of desire.

Bakisat's first-person narrative, on the other hand, is marked through self-love and approval of her own behaviour. In fact, she vehemently defends her decision to leave Jadiger, not allowing the opinion of others to interfere with her emotional independence to evaluate her behaviour according to her own criteria. This difference is particularly visible in the following sentences:

> "**Ты**, конечно, в глубине души понимала, что **богобоязненной женщине** труднее всего переступить порог **супружеского целомудрия**, но, коли уж переступит однажды, ее уже не остановить. И **я** не стала бы таить свои **грехи** ни от кого, и уж тем более от **тебя**? Хватило бы у **тебя** духу спросить о тех днях, когда **я была счастлива** с Азимом, то **откровенно и поведала бы обо всем**, что было. 'Хочешь убить **меня**? Ну, **убивай**!' - **крикнула** бы **тебе**."[84] (241)

The second-person narrator presents a moralising depiction of her behaviour, stressed through the words "god-fearing" and "chastity". In stark contrast, the first-person

[84] "**You**, of course, in the depth of your soul understood that the most difficult thing for a **god-fearing woman** is to cross the threshold of **matrimonial chastity**, but if once crossed there is already no stopping her. And **I** wouldn't hide my **sins** from any one, and even less so from **you**? Could **you** have mastered the courage to ask about those days when **I was happy** with Azim, I would have **openly told you about everything** that happened. 'Do you want to kill **me**? Then **kill me**!' - **I** would have **yelled** at **you**."

narrative expresses a certain sense of pride and self-assertion, even though it still uses the word "sin" to describe her behaviour. Bakisat's behaviour is no longer presented as a mistake. Quite the opposite, through the direct address of Jadiger ("you"), these sentences depict an imaginary dialogue with her former husband in which she takes pride in her new-found happiness and rebels against the idea that she should feel guilty. This self-affirmation is expressed through the first-person ("I") as well as her exclamations "kill me". She doesn't care about any consequences to herself but insists on her freedom of choice.

Azim's point of view is introduced through second-person narrative directly following a second-person Bakisat. Similarly to Jadiger's second-person perspective, Azim's focalisation has an alienating quality. This alienation is expressed through the self-address "дружок" [druzhok][85] and "дружище" [druzhishche][86] (298), thus paralleling Jadiger (see above, 22). In this particular scene, Azim is remembering his hearing in front of the committee, after which he was expelled from the Communist party and lost his job. His self-address as "friend" takes on a self-critical connotation here because he is reflecting on the mistakes he made. Similarly to Bakisat's perspective, Azim is also presented through first-person narrative, although to much lesser extent. The transition from second-person to first-person happens gradually:

> [З]адолго до коференции **твои** противники повели открытую борьбу против **тебя**, везде и всюду заявляя, что вся ваша мышиная возня над картой о прогнозе подземных ресурсов всего лишь зыбкая гипотеза. Они требовали собрать ученых и специалистов-гидрологов и вынести вопрос на широкое обсуждение. Пожалуйста, **собрал** людей. **Поставил** вопрос на

[85] The word is the diminutive form of "friend," which is generally used affectionately.
[86] This word is a colloquial from of "friend," which can also be an expression of familiarity.

обсуждение. Никому рот не **затыкал**. **Давал** высказаться и противникам. И от них выбегало на трибуну немало горячих голов. Выступали. Ярились. Но что **я** мог сделать, если **зал не принимал их**, топал ногами, освистывал. Скажите, в чем **моя** вина?[87] (293).

Here, the personal and possessive pronouns "your" and "you" at first signalise clearly the second-person narrative. The Russian words for "gathered," "put," "gag," and "let" are not specified through personal pronouns (I or you). In fact, it could be either of those, because the past tense in Russian only distinguishes a) between singular and plural, and b) if singular, then between masculine, feminine and neuter. Thus, for a male person, the past tense is the same in first-, second-, and third-person singular. This ambiguity already foreshadows the transition into the first-person narrative which occurs precisely at the moment, when Azim desperately tries to justify his actions, asking, "what could **I** do," and "Tell me, wherein am **I** to blame?". His defence is simple - the criticism of his opponents was not accepted by the audience. However, this audience had already been taken in by earlier talks of Azim's team where the speakers had insisted on the reality of the underground sea depicted on "Azim's map" (карта Азима).[88] Thus, his defence for not conducting proper research that could verify his underground sea hypothesis is simply that a non-scientific audience had already believed him and his supporters. Blinded by

[87] "Long before the conference, **your** opponents led an open war against **you**, announcing everywhere and anywhere that all your mouse-like fuss over the map about the prognosis of underground resources was a mere uncertain hypothesis. They demanded to gather scientists and hydrology specialists and to submit the question to an extensive discussion. Alright, **gathered** people. **Submitted** the question to discussion. Didn't **gag** anyone's mouth. Let also the opponents express their opinion. And not few hot-heads of theirs ran out onto the podium. [They] performed. Became enraged. But what could **I** do, if **the audience did not accept them**, stamped their feet, booed. Tell me, wherein am **I** to blame?"

[88] At this conference, Azim presents a map of an underground sea that he "discovered". As it turns out later, the sea was mere conjecture and not based on any research. The underground sea is supposed to supplant the water resources of the Aral Sea and provide fresh drinking water for the people. In light of this discovery, Azim argues that the freed-up Aral Sea basin can be used to grow cotton (apparently irrigated through the rivers as well as the underground sea).

the shining image of abundant water under the dry steppe soil, the audience did not want to listen to his opponents. Azim's map is indeed a mere mirage of water in the steppe and is based on the same "logic of the irrigation age" that Peterson analyses.[89] This logic is directly contradicted by the narrative itself: After the conference, people from the audience return to their auls and start drilling the ground for water in order to provide potable water for their people. Alas, they only find dry soil.

Another scene that employs first-person narrative is when Azim imagines directly addressing the interrogators[90] at his hearing, thus paralleling Bakisat's imagined dialogue with Jadiger. He argues: "Тут даже не в туркменском Бабаеве дело. Люди, намного могущественнее, чем он, чем **я**, благословляли на это. Вы все... знаете это."[91] (302), focussing the problem away from himself and onto the larger socio-political structure. He furthermore connects the Aral Sea crisis with other problems, e.g. that more and more children are born with deformations.[92] He continues: "Не так ли разве? Если так, то **ответьте мне**, **вы все**, члены бюро горкома партии [...] **скажите-ка** на милость, кто из **вас** посмел поднять голос, хоть словечко сказал против главного зачинщика всенародного зла?"[93] (ibid.). As can be seen, Azim experiences himself as scapegoat. He points out the hypocrisy of his interrogators, for neither did they jeopardise their social,

89 See my Introduction, 2.

90 It is not quite clear whether those interrogators are Russian or Kazakh cadres. Due to the fact that Kazakhs constituted a minority within the Kazakh SSR, it is probable that many of the people in higher positions are not Kazakhs themselves. Nurpeisov himself, however, does not draw attention to this, except for the fact that all his main and secondary characters are clearly ethnic Kazakhs.

91 "This isn't even about Babaev's Turkmen business. People much more powerful than he, than **I**, gave their blessing for this. All of you... know this."

92 Bakisat and Jadiger's two children also have disabilities.

93 "Wasn't it like this? If so, then **answer me, you all**, members of the party's city committee bureau [...] **tell me** honestly, who of **you** dared to raise their voice, if only to say a single word against the main instigator of the nationwide evil?"

academic and/or political careers by speaking out openly against Moscow.

In contrast to Bakisat, who conducts an imaginary conversation with Jadiger in which she defends and explains her decision to cheat on and leave her husband, and who experiences this decision as an affirmation of her freedom, Azim is primarily concerned with his self-vindication. While it is true that he is made into a scapegoat for a larger problem, he nonetheless significantly contributed to the problem itself, inventing an underground sea that does not exist, dismissing any scientific critique that contradicts his mirage of the white city in the steppe. Azim is also obsessed with the question of what precise mistake he has made that led to his social ruin. This is emphasised through the repetition of the word "промахнулся" [promakhnulsia, made a mistake/missed the mark] (e.g. 267 & 284) and its related nouns "промашка" [promashka, blunder/mistake] (267), "дал маху" [dal makhu, screwed up] (288), as well as two italicised sections which stress the importance of this question for him (pp. 288 & 294). The italics of entire sentences and paragraphs is not used anywhere else in the novel and thus doubly emphasises Azim's incredulity at his own demise and his difficulty to grasp his own missteps. These missteps are, for him, not faults in an ethical sense, but rather a fault that he made in the game of life. If he can find the mistake, he can fix it, too.

What unites all three protagonists is their engagement with their inner conflicts, even though those conflicts take on quite different shapes and meanings for each of them. All three are, on the icy steppe, confronted with themselves and their own thoughts and feelings and need to come to terms with their (very different) conceptions of duty and guilt alike. Their personal definition of guilt is connected to their ideas of duty/obligation

both to themselves, but also to others. For Nurpeisov himself, this question of duty was essential. As I have emphasised in the introduction, he saw it as his own duty as an author to write about social, as well as environmental problems. Within the context of such a close textual analysis that relies on specific wordings as well as a close analyses of the narrative point of view, I believe it is my duty to give an insight into what the narrative style in the Kazakh text looks like at least in a short interlude.

2.4. Short Note on Narrative and Translation

My analysis is, of course, mainly based on the Russian text and might therefore not correspond in some details with the Kazakh text. Nonetheless, whenever possible,[94] I have endeavoured to cross-check with the Kazakh when analysing the narrative structures. I would like to first point out one example where the narrative point of view of the Kazakh text differs from its Russian translation: The shift from Bakisat's point of view to Azim's (see 267). This scene presents the narrative shift in an interesting way because it is accomplished through pronouns instead of names, and therefore the narrator is not clearly identifiable. In the Russian translation, the narrative voice switches from Bakisat second-person to Azim second-person. However, in the middle of these two, there are several sentences, separated through asterisks (***) from both the preceding and the following text:

> Апырай, но в чем **ты** все-таки промахнул**ся**? Почему так все скверно обернулось? Разве

[94] Sometimes it is simply not possible to find an exact scene in a foreign-language text. At other times, this is possible due to specific markers in the text itself, e.g. asterisks (***), or the beginning or end of chapters or because a specific Kazakh word is used as well in the Russian text and can therefore be located in the original.

любое дело, которое замышлял **ты** прежде, не выходило именно так, как и было **тобой** задумано? Стало быть, в чем-то была все-таки промашка. В чем?[95] (267).

In the storyline, this shift occurs when Bakisat and Azim, cuddled up under a fur coat on the ice sheet suddenly see a dark shape walk towards them, which they then recognise as Jadiger. In the Russian text, the second-person narrative is continued from the passage above directly and then changes into Azim's second-person. Due to the fact, that the Russian past tense is gendered, the reader already notices that it is no longer Bakisat's second-person, and that it has to be either Jadiger's or Azim's. What is translated as "промахнулся" is the Kazakh "қателесті" [qatelesti][96] - the third-person form (singular *and* plural) of the verb "қателесу" [qatelesu] a verb that means "to make a mistake" (ошибиться, oshibit'sia)[97]. Anatolii Kim's translation uses "промахнулся," which can mean "to make a mistake"[98] but also means "to miss (one's aim)"; "to miss the mark"[99]. There are two details which I would like to point out. First, промахнулся could be the masculine past tense of first-, second-, or third-person singular, since the Russian only distinguishes between masculine, feminine, neuter and plural in the past tense. It is only through the direct addition of "ты" [you] that the reader can recognise the type of

95 "Apyrai, but in what did **you,** after all, miss the mark? Why did everything turn around so badly? Hadn't everything else that **you** had thought up before turned out precisely how it was planned by **you**? And so, what was, after all, the mistake? What?"

96 The following analysis of the Kazakh word and the narrative style are mine. I have relied on the generous help of Fariza Adilbekova to make sense of grammar. She has e.g. pointed out to me that the verb "қателесті" can be both singular and plural third-person. For general grammatical information on Kazakh I am using Thomas Höhmann, *Kauderwelsch. Kasachisch Wort für Wort* (Bielefeld: Reise Know-How Verlag Peter Rump GmbH, 2010).

97 See "Қателесу," Wiktionary, accessed May 28, 2021, https://ru.wiktionary.org/wiki/қателесу.

98 The Russian language wiktionary also gives ошибиться as synonym, see "Промахнуться," Wiktionary, accessed May 28, 2021, https://ru.wiktionary.org/wiki/промахнуться.

99 See "Промахнуться," Wiktionary, accessed May 28, 2021, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/промахнуться.

narrator. However, the translator *had* to make a choice as to how to gender the verb, whereas in Kazakh, this section does not yet imply anything about the gender of the focalizer. The narrator, in Kazakh, is not the second-person, but could be either the third-person singular or plural. The translator's choice of the male gendered past tense verb already presages the shift in narrative from Bakisat as first- and second-person narrator with intermittent third-person narrative with Bakisat as focalizer to the Azim second-person narrative. The Kazakh text is more ambiguous than the Russian translation, hinting that it could even be the point of view of multiple characters. Thus, generally speaking, even though some textual details might vary in terms of narrative strategy and point of view, the general multivocality that depicts different perspectives, as well as the unclear and often ambiguous identity of the narrative voice itself are apparent both in the Russian translation and the Kazakh original.

My second example does not refer to the narrative voice itself, but to interpretations based on lexical connections. Part of my analysis in Chapter Three is based on a close textual analysis of the characters and their worldviews. In my analysis I argue that Jadiger and Azim are paralleled through the usage of specific words. In this light, I have endeavoured to base my analysis not only on the repetition of specific words but also on phrasings that present parallel thoughts themselves. While these parallel thoughts are, in the Russian text, connected through the usage of specific vocabulary, my interpretation does not rely on mere lexical but also on situational and/or contextual correspondences. The extent of the problem can be seen in Nikolai Anastas'ev analysis of the novel as "мифотворчество" (myth-making). While this anaylsis in and of itself is not

necessarily incorrect,[100] what he stresses in his argument is a lexical meaning that the Kazakh text itself simply does not provide: Anastas'ev focuses on the word "темноликий" (dark-faced), which he re-writes as "темноЛИКий," referring to the meaning of "лик" [lik] as both face, but also "image, representation of face *on the ikon.*"[101] The word appears in the very first sentence of the novel "Высокий темноликий человек" (5), and is therefore easy to locate in the novel. The Kazakh text reads "Ұзын қара кісі," literally: Tall, black person.[102] The word "кісі" (person), furthermore is the standard word for 'person,' derived from the Common Turkic and exists (in their variations) in many other Turkic languages as well (e.g. the Uzbek "kishi").[103] I hope I have been able to avoid such mistakes.

End of Short Note.

While the Russian text might, in some instances, not directly correlate to each and every change in narrative focus of the Kazakh original, the pattern itself remains. The text oscillates between different narrative strategies, alternatively using second-person, third-person and even first-person narration. Both narrative style and structure rely on ambiguity and undecidability. While the achronological mixture of different memories make it difficult for the reader to keep track of the timeline of the different memories, the

[100] Indeed, Enkar T. Kakilbaeva also analyses the mythological aspect of the novel. See Enkar T. Kakilbaeva, "Poetika dilogii Abdizhamila Nurpeisovs 'Poslednii Dolg' v mifologicheskom aspekte," *Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices* 17, no. 2 (2020): 204-14. In contrast to Anastas'ev, I find her more informative, which might be due to the fact that she specialises in Philology and World Literature (in Kazakhstan), while Anastas'ev is a Russian Americanist.

[101] See "Лик," Wiktionary, accessed May 28, 2021, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/лик#Russian.

[102] See "Ұзын," "қара," "кісі," Wiktionary, accessed May 28, 2021, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ұзын; https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/қара; https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/кісі.

[103] See ibid.

alternations between second-, third-, and even occasionally first-person narrative make it difficult, and to some degree even impossible to distinguish between narrator and focalizer on the one hand, and, on the other, to determine the identity of the narrator at all. The second-person narrative, for instance, might be interpreted as the narrator addressing his own character, or, as someone within the textual universe addressing the protagonist. However, the alternation of second- and third-person narrative creates the feeling that the characters are talking to themselves, addressing themselves in second-person, and thereby disassociating themselves from their own experiences. Simultaneously, the second-person narrative voice often recounts details that could hardly be known by the characters themselves and thus contradicts the narrative style of the self-addressing interior monologue.

This is furthermore complicated through several moments in the narrative, when an omniscient narrator presages the future development of the Aral Sea region. Of particular interest is the very end of the Azim narration. As he leaves the others on the ice sheet and begins walking towards the aul, the narrative voice begins to distance itself more and more from Azim, until, finally, it starts telling what will happen not only with Azim, but with the entire Aral Sea region. Here, the narrative switches into a second-person plural: "И хотя все эти долгие годы **нас** не было рядом с тобой, **мы можем представить себе, как и чем ты жил**"[104] (328), stressing that he will continue to suffer from sleepless nights, remembering the past, always asking himself, what his mistake had been. The narrative voice not only paints the future shrinking of the Aral

[104] "And even though, through all these long years, **we** were not around you, **we can imagine how and whereby you lived**."

Sea, but also passes judgement on Azim. The thought that will haunt him is not that he left Bakisat and Jadiger behind. Neither his behaviour towards them, nor his behaviour towards his home town at the Aral Sea is the source of his insomnia, but his incapability of realising his own guilt.

All of these elements should not be dismissed as mere narrative 'inconsistencies'. First of all, because a literary text is in no way obliged to adhere to narrative styles described by narratologists, and secondly because such a dismissal leads to an underestimation of the artistic qualities of the novel.[105] Nurpeisov spent several decades writing the novel which suggests that both style and structure were consciously chosen. This agrees with Gerol'd Bel'ger's description of Nurpeisov as a very meticulous writer who often rewrote sentences and paid a lot of attention to detail.[106]

The fact that it is difficult to keep track of the timeline or to clearly define the narrator's and/or the focalizer's point of view is not the result of 'inconsistencies' in the narrative logic but the result of a narrative style that is consciously engineered in order to mirror the narrative content: The novel describes three people in a very extreme situation (wandering around in the snow and then being stuck on an ice sheet in the middle of a sea) who remember different moments of their lives. Like memories themselves, there is no chronological logic in how they follow one another in the narrative. The exact

[105] In light of the historical treatment of Central Asian literature as artistically less valuable, the latter point is particularly important and its repercussions can be felt in the English translation of the novel, which is, unfortunately, rather negligent in this regard. The translation opens the first chapter directly with "You, ...", thus undermining the carefully constructed beginning of the novel which, in Kazakh - and this is transported into both the Russian and the German translations - begins with the third-person narrative and only after several sentences morphs into a second-person narrative. The English translation, however, chose to override this narrative choice through the much more dramatic direct address "You" as the very first word of the novel. See *Final Respects*, 13.

[106] See Herold Belger, "The Burden of Debt: Remarks on the Work of Abdizhamil Nurpeysov," *World Literature Today* 70, no. 3 (1996): 541.

timeline of what happens, or when it happens, is never entirely clear. The chronology can be guessed at from various connecting points between the different episodes of the past, but it remains rather confusing. One scene is of particular importance because it is told three times, twice from Jadiger's perspective in the first part of the novel, and once from Bakisat's point of view in the second part. It is the scene of domestic violence in which Jadiger attacks Bakisat. The first time this scene is depicted is from Jadiger's point of view and gives only vague information, while the second one shows that Jadiger does remember much more than the reader could have deducted from the first time Jadiger remembers the scene. Then, in the second part, the scene is told again from Bakisat's point of view, thereby filling the blanks from Jadiger's narrative. In other scenes, the shift between different narrative voices is used as a clever tool that allows for the narrative to present the emotions and thoughts of a character while simultaneously, at a meta-level, to comment about e.g. the human condition itself through an observing narrator who is distinct from the narrator and/or focalizer.

However, these 'inconsistencies' are more than just a clever narrative device. They also reflect human inconsistencies throughout the novel. Just like a society cannot be reduced to a single, consistent opinion about women, the environment, Russia or Kazakh culture, a narrative text about this society and its many contradictory attitudes towards questions of ethnicity, gender and social development cannot be described from one single point of view. Thus, the unconventional freedom of the narrator to zoom in on the emotional lives of the protagonists and to also zoom out, to watch the events from above, from a neutral distance, reflects the very content and emphasis of the novel, namely to

represent the Kazakh people in their multiplicity. The narrative voice accomplishes a multifaceted description of the social fabric of Soviet Kazakhstan precisely through its depiction of different, and sometimes contradictory, points of view. In the following I will analyse these contradictory images of and opinions about women, Kazakhs and the relationship to the Soviet modernisation campaign in more detail. Thereby, I will focus on how these opinions are influenced by internalised oppression and sovietisation.

III. ETHINCITY, SOVIETISATION AND FEMINISM

3.1. Between Centre and Periphery

Final Respects is a book first and foremost about Kazakhs, their lives and hardships, but nevertheless, Moscow's influence is all-present, be it the need to fulfil fishing quota (Jadiger) or the idea that dominating nature means progress (Azim). Additionally, throughout the text, the Soviet ideal of women is felt. They need to be all in one: hard workers for communism, mothers and domestic workers. Indeed the Soviet Union looms over the narrative as colonial power that is decisive in everything that happens – even in the small aul in the Aral Sea region. Contrary to its central power, it is almost absent from the narrative itself, only hinted at, but ever-present in the diction of local life. The only time Moscow is directly mentioned is during Azim's hearing, after which he loses both his job and party membership. When he is asked about the foundation of his theory that it is more profitable to drain the entire Aral Sea than to preserve it, the following explanation ensues:

> [Азим:] Возможно, основы... основы, как таковой, возможно, и нет. Кроме... Разве, кроме той, что **море все равно обречено**. Там, наверху... **на самом верху**... - Постой! Ты что имеешь в виду? **Москву**? [asks the interrogator] - Ну, да... Там... там уже вынесли ему смертный приговор.. - Продолжай! - Если говорить откровенно... **что им какое-то там Аральское море**... Им **вся Средняя Азия**, вместе взятая.. Им... **им хлопок нужен**. - Выходит, можно всеми нами, **живым народом, пожертвовать ради хлопка**. Так ли? [...] Ты. Как руководитель головного института по водным проблемам республики - ты поднимал свой голос против такого откровенного посягательства на Арал? - Ну, что мы... **Выступать против Москвы до**

перестройки... Сами знаете...[107] (299f.)

While some characters[108] criticise the outcome of Moscow's policies – they do not directly question the hegemony of Moscow itself. A critique of Moscow is, however, the direct outcome of the narrative style. Both narrative structure and point of view emphasise the experiences of the local population. In fact, Nurpeisov's novel presents a rich fabric of local culture, historical past and social engagement in Kazakhstan, which lays bare the many ways in which local communities are negatively impacted and influenced by the socio-political hegemony of Moscow.

In strictly economical and political terms, this means that Moscow dictates the fishing quotas that need to be fulfilled and that Moscow determines the economic importance of Central Asia. While Moscow was quick to establish the area as main cotton producer, there was no intention to build fabrics so that the raw materials produced in Central Asia could also be processed there, thus paralleling the Tsarist attitude towards the region. The Central Asian periphery was mainly used and exploited as primary sector, while the primary products where transported back to the industrial centres within Russia, as Kappeler explains:

With its single-crop and cotton-based economy, Middle Asia, which was particularly backward,

[107] "[Azim:] It is possible that a basis... a basis in and of itself, it is possible that it doesn't exist. Except... Except, perhaps, that the **sea is doomed anyway**. There, at the top... **at the very top**... - Wait! What are you saying? **Moscow**? [asks the interrogator] - Well, yes... There... there they have already pronounced it's [the sea's] death sentence.. - Continue! - To speak openly... **what is something like the Aral Sea to them**... To them, **all Central Asia**, taken together.. They... **They need cotton**. - It appears that all of us, a **living people** can be **sacrified for the sake of cotton**. Doesn't it? [...] You. As the director of the main institute of the republic's water problems - did you raise your voice against such an open infringement upon the Aral? - Well, you see... **To come out against Moscow, before perestroika**... You know yourselves..."

[108] Similar to the interrogators, whenever it is an unnamed character, the ethnicity of the person is not directly defined.

> remained dependent on the centre in a wholly colonial manner. [...] The centre deliberately emphasized the division of labour between the republics, and thus their mutual economic interaction and dependence. (361)

Soviet exploitation of Kazakh resources is mainly represented through Jadiger. Even though he desperately suffers from witnessing the desiccation of the Aral Sea and tries to alert his superiors to the problem, he is devoted to fulfilling the fishing quota from Moscow, not realising that other Kazakhs are under the same pressure to fulfil quotas for grain or cotton production.[109] While the novel itself never directly makes that connection, it does represent members of other fishing kolkhozes, who also try to fulfil their quota. Of particular interest is the clear rivalry between the different kolkhozes, instigated precisely through their need to fulfil quotas. This is made visible in the scene where fishermen from different kolkhozes are testing the ice to see if it will hold their trucks. Jadiger is the only one who decides to try the ice. In reaction to the chairman of another kolkhoz who is running next to his truck, trying to dissuade him, the second-person narrator comments - and in this case, it can be interpreted as Jadiger's own thoughts: "Ты же знал, что не о госимуществе, не о твоей шкуре он беспокоится"[110] (59). Whatever the intentions of the other chairman, this clearly points towards the competition between the two fishing kolkhozes. Despite the fact that both are working towards the same goal - producing fish for the Soviet economy, they do not work together to achieve this goal.

[109] Russophone Kazakh writer Rollan Seisenbaev more clearly points towards this problem in his novel *Мертвые бродят в песках* (2002, first published 1991, transl. *The Dead Wander in the Desert*, 2019), where an old man from a fishing aul near the sea goes to visit another man who needs to irrigate his fields in order to fulfil his quota. This novel does not only depict the Aral Sea crisis, but also many other environmental and human catastrophes. Among them there is a very visceral scene describing the Kazakh famine in the early 1930s.

[110] "But you knew that he worries neither about state property, nor about your skin."

Quite the contrary, the scarce resource 'fish' has become one that can only be attained through out-doing other fishermen, thus highlighting the intensity of the Aral Sea crisis, which does not only affect the sea level, but also the availability of fish.

Jadiger is, however, unable to realise that this competition is absolutely pointless, all that counts for him is the success of *his* fishermen, and thus he rerepresents a mixture of sovietisation and internalised imperialism. Sovietisation because he clearly identifies as Soviet citizen, as being part of the Soviet project that requires the product fish. Internalised imperialism because, for him, the imperial project is his own project. He also accepts the idea that the periphery needs to be used by the central power in order to achieve progress. Part of this dynamic is certainly the pressure that he feels, when he says: "Если я уеду, лов рыбы сорвется. И так **квратальный план** по сдаче рыбы опять не выполнили"[111] (17). Nonetheless, what he experiences as success is the achievement of the fishing quota for Moscow. It is the fulfilment of a goal set by the Soviet centre that is seen as the measure of individual and communal success - communal, however, only in so far as one belongs to the kolkhoz that successfully produces the required quota. This external success is, in turn, what he is then praised for among his own community: the fishermen themselves. Thus, social prestige in large parts is given according to success within the Soviet system itself,[112] a system that can only be described as imperial - even though it may have self-described as anti-imperial.[113] However, this social prestige needs to be fought for, even against other kolkhozes who

[111] "If I leave, the catching of fish will fail. And then we've again not fulfilled the **quarter's plan** for fish."

[112] This is similar to how Azim is viewed by his fellow Kazakhs: As the one of them who made it in the capital and who the entire aul is proud of.

[113] This discrepancy between self-description and reality is analysed in detail in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

are in exactly the same situation: "Да, в этот раз **ты** удивил всех... Что там ни говори, а **вся рыба** в заречных озерах и в старице **досталась вам одним**"[114] (66). Here it is visible, that for Jadiger his own success is deeply connected to the ability of creating an advantage for his fishermen so that they can, communally, achieve success through the fulfilment of the quota. As this implies, however, their success simultaneously signifies the failure of their competitors.

Another way in which this power-dynamic between centre and periphery is expressed is through internalised racism, which, in the case of Azim, is intertwined with internalised imperialism and affected by sovietisation. The interconnection of these three elements can be seen most clearly in the way in which Azim thinks about his fellow Kazakhs, what he perceives as the historical development, and humanity's relationship to nature.

Azim, the successful academic, sees himself as different from the ordinary people surrounding him and populating the capital, Alma-Ata[115], and thereby draws a distinction between his own Kazakh identity and the other Kazakhs. His rejection of them is based on his perceived superiority through education and social status, while he only pities the average citizen for their meagre life. As he is watching a funeral procession, he speculates about who the deceased might be: "Небось работал на одном из заводов. Пропивал зарплату. Не уживался с семьей. [...] И ты искренне жалел беднягу. Зачем

[114] "Yes, this time, you surprised everyone... Let alone that all the fish in the lakes beyond the river and in the former river-bed fell to your lot alone."

[115] Today Almaty. After independence the capital was moved to Astana, which has since been renamed Nur-Sultan in honour of the first president of independent Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev.

нужна человеку такая жизнь?"[116] (279). Azim imagines this based on the fact that it is not a rich funeral and that not many people accompany the ceremony. The distinction is drawn between himself, the successful academic and the poor fabric labourer, and it is final - nothing connects the two of them. This is furthermore underlined by the negative description which reflects Azim's bias towards the working class as drunkards and troublemakers. The formulation "why does/should a person need/want such a life" is cynical, particularly on an extra-textual level, for the answer would be: Azim. Everything that Azim cherishes, the fine clothes, the modern car etc., are products of fabric labourers - indeed, his lifestyle exists only because of, and necessitates, both fabrics and the people working in them.

His condescending opinion of 'ordinary' people is also expressed in the way he thinks about the "steppe people" (степняки, stepniaki) who attend the talk at his institute where he presents "Azim's map" (карта Азима). The talk takes place in Alma-Ata. Both the city and Azim represent the Soviet centre, while the simple folk, i.e. the people from auls who sit in the audience, represent the Kazakh periphery. This is the same conference that Azim remembers in his interrogation (see above, 27f.).

> [Н]еясно еще, **что дошло и что не дошло** до этих **степняков-каратаяков***[117], которым только и привычно, что **плестись по пустыне**, под палящим солнцем, за своими пыльными отарами. Но **ничего не поделаешь**, на подобных мероприятиях **приходится даже Большому Дому носится с ними**, не зная, как ублажить их и куда их усадить. А **они, сердечные, рады, что им выпадает никогда кое-какое внимание**, за что безмерно благодарны начальству.

[116] "He probably used to work in one of the fabrics. Used to drink up his salary. Didn't get along with the family. [...] And you heartily felt sorry about the poor lad. Why should a person need such a life?"

[117] The asterisk (*) is one of the rare footnotes explaining Kazakh terms: "Каратаяк - букв. 'черная палка'" [Karataiak - lit. 'black stick/cane'] (287).

> Потому и **заранее согласны со всеми ораторами, хотя, разумеется, ничегошеньки не понимают из того, что здесь говорится на непонятном им языке**. А властям только это и нужно: чтобы низы поддерживали и одобрали 'бурными, долго не смолкающми аплодисментами'.[118] (287f.)

The distance between the accomplished, educated members of his institute and the Big House on the one side and the 'steppe people' on the other could hardly be declared more clearly. While it is a burden to him and his social sphere to have to communicate with the masses, the masses themselves are like children, "heartfelt"and "happy" to receive even the slightest amount of attention. They give their applause to anyone who speaks even though they do not understand anything.[119] They themselves are not even worthy of his attention, he merely needs them to cheer on his ideas. He does not even accord them the ability to form any thoughts of their own in reaction to what they hear. The assertion that the people do not even understand what is said is interesting, since the expression of "a language that is incomprehensible to them" refers to two things simultaneously. Firstly, that he does not think that they can understand the academic language, and secondly that there is indeed a difference in language: Russian and Kazakh.[120] In both this and the

[118] "It wasn't clear, what did or did not reach those **steppe black-sticks**, who were only used to **trudging through the desert** after their dusty flock under the scorching sun. But, **nothing to be done**, in such events **even the Big house has to pay attention to them**, not knowing how to gratify them and where to let them sit down. But **they, heartfelt, happy that some sort of attention is accorded them**, for this, they feel infinite gratitude towards the authorities. Therefore they are already **beforehand in accord with all the speakers even though they, of course, do not understand anything at all of what is here spoken about in a language that is incomprehensible to them.** And this is precisely what the authorities need: that the lower strata support and approve 'with a turbulent, long, not ceasing applause'."

[119] Interestingly, several pages later, in his imaginary response to his interrogators, Azim describe how the people do not applaud his opponents, contradicting his insistence that they will applaud anyone who speaks.

[120] In the Kazakh text, there is at least one scene in which this difference of language is made visible in the text itself. It is a conversation between Azim and Bakisat, in which they use Russian to communicate, which also shows their sovietisation. Of course, the Russian language was of utter importance both

preceding example, Azim's point of view is heavily influenced by elitist prejudices, not only about the working class, but, in particular, about the Kazakh (and, broader, Central Asian) working class who are used to "trudging through the desert". Here, he is indirectly pointing towards nomadism and it is implied that he considers shepherding and/or nomadism to be a less valuable form of life in comparison to sedentary city-dwellers. This, in particular, represents his own sovietisation, as well as the internalised imperial logic (both of the Tsarist, as well as the Soviet empires) of the "backwardness" [отсталость] of nomadism: "backwardness was attributed to all the Central Asian peoples. But nomadism was an aggravating factor,"[121] because it was considered to be an inefficient method of production. Particularly during Soviet rule, the general idea was that nomadism had to "catch up" in terms of human progress towards socialism because it had not even reached the capitalist stage, which was precisely the rationale behind the sedentarisation campaign which was partly responsible for the famine in the early 1930s.

Azim expresses his negative opinion about nomadism and Kazakh culture even more baldly in the first part of the book during a conversation with Jadiger, clearly

socially and politically. As Nurpeisov himself remarks in an essays from 1987, the hierarchy of languages between Russian and Kazakh displayed itself in the fact that many of those who only speak Kazakh do not continue their education in institutions partly because it is required of them to be fluent in Russian: "дети чабанов пока, скажу откровенно, слабо владеют русским языком" [the children of the shepherds, to speak openly, are still not very fluent in Russian] (Essays, 307). Nupreisov does not only argue that Kazakh speakers should learn Russian - he also emphasises the need for Russophone people living in Kazakhstan (the national Kazakhstani in contrast to ethnic Kazakhs) to learn Kazakh. For him, there should not be a hierarchy between the languages but a co-existence on equal footing and describes his identity as both Kazakh and Soviet, and therefore "для меня одинаково дороги и значимы оба эти видения мира, которые для себя открыл с помощью двух языков - казахского и русского." [for me, they are equally dear and important those two views on the world which I have opened for myself with the help of two languages - Kazakh and Russian.] (ibid., 308).

[121] Thomas Alun, *Nomads and Soviet Rule. Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (I.B. Tauris: New York, 2018).

pointing to the supposed backwardness of Kazakh culture in comparison to Europe. Inviting him to come by and visit his mother, Jadiger says:

> - Дай только заранее знать. Барашка зарежем. Азим рассмеялся. - **Казах** из тебя так и прет. Тебе, наверное, неизвестно, дружище, что в наше время **европейцы** встречают гостя только чашкой кофе. [...] - У каждого народа свои обычаи, - буркнул ты [т.е. Жадигер]. - Сказал! **Какой прок нынешним казахам от твоих дедовских чапанов и лошадок?**[122] (210)

Azim is not only sovietised, but also europeanised - but not only that. In adopting the habits of another culture he has also assimilated their way of thinking about his own people. For many peoples of Central Asia, hospitality is a central part of their culture: Guests are seated in a place of honour and seen as a blessing, while preparing food for them is a sign of affection and respect.[123] This is partly connected to their traditional life in the steppe where helping a stranger could mean the difference between life and death. For Azim, however, Kazakh traditions are meaningless because they do not serve any practical purpose anymore, which is emphasised through the word "прок" (use, benefit). Within the context of Soviet Kazakhstan and Azim's Soviet upbringing and education, this does not actually surprise. Russians (as well as all other sedentary societies) had

[122] "- Just let us know ahead of time. We'll slaughter a lamb. Azim burst out laughing. - You reek of **Kazakh**. You are probably not aware, my friend, that **Europeans** meet their guests with only a cup of coffee nowadays. [...]. - Every nation has their own customs, - you [i.e. Jadiger] growled out. - He said so! What use is there for contemporary Kazakhs in your grandfatherly chapans [traditional Central Asian coat] and horses?"

[123] This in particular distinguishes Azim's conception of hospitality that is defined through a cup of coffee. While the Kazakh tradition of slaughtering a lamb for the meal in the honour of the guest is an invitation to share a meal, the cup of coffee (particularly the way Azim expresses it) signifies a short, time-wise efficient, visit. What he adopts as European norm seems to me a very business-like meeting over a cup of coffee, which does not reflect all forms of European hospitality. For Kazakh hospitality, see Paula A. Michael, "A Journey through Kazakh Hospitality," in *Everyday Life in Central Asia. Past and Present*, ed. Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (Bloomington: Indidana University Press, 2007), 149; 152.

always seen nomadism as a backward form of life. Under Soviet rule, pastoral nomadism was seen as an obstacle to the building of communism itself. Therefore efforts were made in order to influence and sovietise the local population. As Paula A. Michael summarises:

> In industry, education, medicine, and the arts, the Soviet government mobilized the masses to forge a new culture based on socialist, urban, Russian values. Newspapers, newsreels, pamphlets, festivals, and public speeches are just some of the venues used to represent traditional Kazakh life as backward, dirty, and primitive. In contrast, Soviet economic, political, and social goals seemingly stood for progress, rationality, and modernity.[124]

Next to his condescending views on Kazakh traditions, Azim has also internalised the Soviet ideal of industrialisation and modernisation, an influence that is particularly strongly expressed in his attitude towards nature. In the continuation of the above scene, Jadiger remembers an article by Azim where the latter explains: "Мы не рабы, а **хозяева природы** […] Мы не против природы, мы лишь за ее **рациональное** и **эффективное** использование."[125] (210). This reflects the Soviet ideology that science can subdue and control nature: "Со дня полета Гагарина в космос, - говорил он [т.е. Азим], - наступил конец зависимости человека от природы. Как сказал поэт[126], земля будет отныне поклонятся человеку."[127] (249). Indeed, for Azim, nature itself needs to "work": "природа - не музейный экспонат. Она должна работать на

[124] Paula A. Michael, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban," *Feminist Studies.* 27, no. 2 (2001): 312.

[125] "We are not the slaves, but the masters of nature [...] We are not against nature, we are only for its rational and effective use."

[126] He is referring to the Russophone Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov and his poem "Земля поклонись человеку". This poem was written in celebration of the first flight into the cosmos by Yuri Gagarin on April 12th, 1961.

[127] "Since the day of Gagarin's flight ino the cosmos, - said he [i.e. Azim], - began the end of man's dependence on nature. Like the poet said, from now on will earth bow to mankind."

повседневность"[128] (211). But not only does nature need to work, the desiccation of the Aral Sea follows the logic of history itself:

> Такова **логика истории**. Численность населения на Земле растет бурно. И всем нынче ясно, что такое количество народы **мы просто не прокормим дедовским способом хозяйствования.** [...] И дело даже не в том, как прокормить людей, но еще и в том, как их всех трудоустроить. Вот в чем проблема, вот почему мы предлагаем самый **эффективный** и **прогрессивный** выход: выращивать на освобожденной от моря плодородной земле... - Вы что... с ума посходили все? Вы там будете добывать только соль, понимаешь, соль, а не хлопок растить![129] (213); "[Азим:] **По нашим предположениям**, если хочешь знать, на Аралькой низменности [...] наши потомки добьются мировых рекордов по урожайности хлопка. Вот так![130] (215)

As can be seen, Azim does not even take the possibility into account, that his prognostics might be incorrect or that reality might not develop according to his plans. Furthermore, he clearly posits nomadism as an ineffecitve form of production in comparison to large scale irrigated agriculture. What Azim does not understand is that different climates and environmental circumstances require different froms of production. As Maya Peterson points out, the irrigation projects often caused more harm than good because there was little understanding of the local conditions. Soil in the steppe is not simply soil. It contains higher amounts of salt, which, if the soil is swamped with too much water, is

[128] "Nature is not a museum exponat. It ought to work in everyday life."

[129] "Such is **the logic of history.** Population numbers on earth are growing rapidly. And nowadays it is clear to everyone that **we simply cannot feed** such and amount of people **with traditional ways of agriculture**. [...] And its not even about how to feed the people, but also about how to provide work to all of them. This is the problem, this is why we suggest the most **effective** and **progressive** solution: to grow on the fertile earth cleared from the sea... - You what... have all of you gone mad? There you will get only salt, do you understand, salt, and not grow cotton!"

[130] "[Azim:] **According to our hypothesis**, if you'd like to know, on the Aral lowland [...] will our descendents obtain world records in the production of cotton. Voilà!"

carried to the surface where it remains as hard, salty crust. This underlines the problematic relationship between centre and periphery: The centre underestimates differences in local conditions and imagines that its own methods can be applied anywhere through their expertise in engineering. Peterson describes this as the "logic of the irrigation age," an imperialist logic that many European powers applied in non-European territory.[131] Jadiger, who has witnessed the way in which the area changes due to the shallowing of the sea, knows that where once the Aral Sea was, only salt-soil will remain.[132]

While Azim's opinion about Kazakh traditions is mainly a negative one, Jadiger's is more complicated. Looking at the many houses that are now empty because people have begun moving away from the area, makes him sad. The narrative voice becomes more distant and it is unclear whether the following section displays Jadiger's thoughts or whether the narrative voice is providing additional information. This is also one of the few sections that emphasise the historical setting:

> **В тридцатые годы**, когда **тебя** [...] **еще** и в помине **не было**, по всему побережью Арала спешно **организовывались** рыболовецкие колхозы; [...] впервые запестрели белые, точно чайки на берегу, аккуратные домики рыбачьего поселка; тогда же **построили** школу, клуб,

[131] See Peterson.

[132] Chingis Aitmatov has formulated a similar critique of the human conviction that nature can be controlled and subdued by science in his novel *И дольше века длится день* (1980, transl. *The Day Lasts More Than Hundred Years*, 1983), where human astronauts come into contact with extraterrestrial life. In the novel, the desiccation of the Aral Sea is mentioned only in passing, and therefore not obviously connected to the environmental catastrophe on the other planet. This other planet who is inhabited by intelligent, human-like beings is facing a dire problem: their planet is drying up. While the extraterrestrians are able to control the weather through science, they cannot explain why their planet is losing its water resources. Therefore they are trying to find a solution to their problem - one of those solutions is the potential resettlement of the entire population to a new, habitable planet. What this points towards, is that science cannot really control nature, it can only modify and manipulate but never control the outcome.

магазин, баню, правление; и в душах недавних кочевников поселилось **непривычное успокоение**. **А теперь**... Взгляд снова вернулся к останкам домов.[133] (79)

What sticks out particularly is that in the context of the 30s and collectivisation, there is no mention of the famine that decimated the Kazakh population. Of course, during Soviet times the famine was not discussed as such, which emphasises again the fact that Jadiger, as well as Azim, grew up under Soviet rule. The collectivisation campaign is here depicted in a positive light, emphasised through the words "organised" and "built". The settlement of the nomadic peoples is presented through the description of the soul of those who had, not long ago, been nomads: "an unusual tranquilisation[134]" is the positive change. The image evoked is that nomadism is unsettling (maybe also exciting), without calm or relaxation and a constant struggle. An even starker contrast is drawn between the bright image of collectivisation that brought education, housing, hygiene etc., and the current degeneration of the aul. The 'neat white houses' are left and Jadiger remembers that these are the houses of 25 families who left the aul in search of a better life. Thus, while the scene draws an idyllic and romanticised image of collectivisation, it also showcases the contemporary problem that arose from the Aral Sea crisis. This crisis is also an outcome of forced sedentarisation and collectivisation in the Kazakh steppe, the goal of which was to transform the land into the main cotton producer of the Soviet Union through extensive irrigation - i.e. the irrigation that deprived the Aral Sea of the

[133] "**In the thirties**, when **you** [...] **still** did **not exist** at all, fishing kolkhozes **were** hurriedly **being organised** along the entire Aral coastline; [...] began to appear, for the first time, just as white as the seagulls on the coast, the neat houses of the fishing village; at that time they also **built** a school, nightclub, store, bathhouse, the administration; and in the souls of the former nomads **an unusual tranquilisation** settled down. **But now**... [Your] gaze again turned to the remnants of the houses."

[134] Additionally to tranquilisation, "успокоение" can also be translated as comfort, pacification, but also as sedation and appeasement.

water supply that stabilises the sea level.

Just like Soviet influence itself is not depicted onesidedly as bad - indeed, Bakisat would not have been able to divorce Jadiger without Soviet marriage laws - Kazakh tradition and culture are also not presented as univocally good. Both are presented in their disadvantages and advantages alike, and sometimes it becomes difficult to even clearly distinguish between the direct influences of Kazakh traditions, sovietisation and new Kazakh ideas and habits that are maybe more a reaction to sovietisation than traditionally Kazakh world views. In the following I will show this along the lines of gender, because it is particularly here that contradictory images of femininity and woman-hood come into play, showcasing the problematic relationship between traditionality and sovietisation.

3.2. The Woman-Question

While the legends of Kazakh women, Jadiger's ancestresses, present Kazakh women as strong, warrior-like and independent, it is Jadiger's mother who opines that women belong in the kitchen. She is very adamant in her declarations, partly because she believes that the changed position of women in society negatively impacts her son:

> Каким бы баба нынче ни была божеством, что за **срам - уйти из дома, не напоив мужа с дороги чаем**. [Жадигер:] - У нее там... в школе занятия. - '*Занати'!* Слова-то какое! ***Занати***[135] **женщины не там, а тут, у очага.** Ее **Богом данная** обязанность - **ухаживать за мужем, ублажать его**. [...] - Не видел я что-то, **чтобы казашке**[136] **худо было от равноправия**. -

[135] The Russian relies on the word game "занятие" which (in plural) means classes or lessons, i.e. is referring to school, but can also mean (mostly in singular) work or occupation.

[136] Russian genders nationalities/ethnicities and therefore has different words for male Kazakhs 'казах' and

Молчи уж! Вот и **сидишь тут из-за бабьего равноправия**, как одинокий пень. **Жди теперь, пока твоя 'равноправие' вернется** с *ушетельского* собрания.[137] (78)

What is interesting here is that Jadiger's mother does not insist on Kazakh tradition to make her point, but rather invokes God. Here, the repressive instant is not based on a conception of traditional cultural norms, but on a God-given gender divide. Religion does, in fact, play a mayor role throughout the novel with several characters (even the convinced Atheist Azim) praying to Allah, but also to Tengris, the Turkic deity of the sky, in their times of need. Through Jadiger's mother, this religiosity is described in terms of its influence on gender roles, particularly, the function of women and the duties of a wife: She is supposed to first and foremost care about her husband, be at home and serve him. Jadiger, on the other hand, tries to defend both Bakisat's absence and gender-equality.

It is important to note that this scene occurs within a very specific narrative context, which complicates the two character's opinions on women's rights. Shortly before their dialogue, Jadiger's mother[138] is introduced as a dominant woman who took

female Kazakhs 'казашка'.

137 "Whatever sort of divine being woman has become nowadays, what a **disgrace - to leave the house without having given tea to drink to the returning husband**. [Jadiger:] - She has there... lessons in school. - '**Lessons'! What a word! The task of a woman isn't there, but here, at the hearth**. Her **God-given** duty is **to look after her husband, to please him**. [...] - I didn't see anything that suggests **that equality turned out bad for female Kazakhs**. - Shut up! Now **you are sitting here because of women's equality**, like a lonely stump. **Now wait until your 'equality' returns** from the teacher's meeting."

138 His mother is never called by her name. This repeatedly happens with female characters, even if they have a specific narrative function, e.g. the woman who sings a wonderful song to say good-bye to the area when she is leaving together with 25 families. Azim's wife also does not have a name. Most men, however, have names. Another aspect that is noteworthy in this context is that the entire novel is mainly a story about men. There are a lot of secondary plotlines about specific male characters (Sary Shaia, Red-head Ivan, the driver Koshban, Koshen) in order to draw attention to different kinds of masculinity. There are, however, no secondary storylines depicting the point of view of women, expect for a couple of lines about Jadiger's mother, one page about his legendary ancestresses, and a half-page description of a dream of Bakisat's mother (who is also nameless). Bakisat is the only woman who is given more attention in the narrative itself. The second part, where a section of the novel is narrated through her point of view, gives a closer insight into her thoughts, emotions and opinions. While her

over the task of fishing during WWII, distinguishing herself through exceptional courage. Jadiger also remembers how she would always sing songs about her legendary warrior ancestresses. Nonetheless, the emphasis does not lie on the entirety of Kazakh women, but on a specific sub-group. This is highlighted through the cultural specifities of the mother's kin, the Tleu-Kabak (Тлеу-Кабак) in contrast to Jadiger's father's kin, the Zhakaim (Жакаим). In this scene, the focus lies entirely on his mother's kin, while his father's is not directly mentioned: "джигиты из **материнского рода** - Тлеу-Кабак - отличались редким бесстрашием, а девушки - особой гордостью степнячек. Говорят, они в боях не уступали в храбрости даже самым отчаянным джигитам"[139] (76). Through the differentiation between kinship groups (род), as well as through the emphasis on the legendary (i.e. not written, but oral history) character of the stories, the historical situation of Kazakh women remains elusive - not because the legends are not real, but because they might represent unusual women, who are memorised through song because of their exceptionality. Nonetheless, their lives and their bravery is remembered dearly and therefore they function as female role models.

Oral tradition itself plays a mayor role in remembering past generations, but not only the memory or historical knowledge is imparted through these legends. As Nurpeisov points out in his autobiography, he knew his ancestors mainly through stories, legends, and the verse composed in their honour.[140] This is how he describes the

section in the second part (~33p.) is about three times longer than the wolf's point of view (~11p.), it is only half as long as Azim's focalisation (~ 61p.). While Jadiger's section in part two is only half as long as Bakisat's (~14p.), he is the primary folcalizer throughout the entire first part.

139 "The dzhigits of the **maternal clan/kin** - Tleu-Kabak - distinguished themselves through rare fearlessness, and the girls - through the distinct pride of the steppe-women. It is said that in fights they were not inferior in their bravery even to the most reckless dzhigits."

140 See Essays, 13.

importance and meaning of oral history:

> [У]стное народное творчество, особенно поэтические легенды, имеют у кочевников не только эстетическую, но и познавательную, еще точнее, историческую ценность. Из богатого событиями прошлого народ сохраняет в памяти только то, из чего потомки смогут извлекать **нравственные и социальные уроки.**[141]

Insight into the Zhakaim clan is given through specific people who are identified as Zhakaim: a corpulent scientist who works for Azim, and Jadiger's uncle Sary Shaia. Both of them are characterised negatively. Jadiger's father is presented through a childhood memory that portrays him as deeply religious, praying in secret behind closed shutters even under Soviet rule. One mayor difference between the way in which the two clans are represented is through gender. Women, i.e. Jadiger's mother, her ancestresses, as well as a songstress are Tleu-Kabak, while all the Zhakaim who are depicted are men. This connection between women's lives and Kazakh kinship groups is important for two reasons. Firstly, because it establishes Kazakh tradition as something that is not monolithic, but heterogeneous, and, secondly, because it disconnects Jadiger's mother's opinion from Kazakh tradition itself. In the end, it is not quite clear whether (and if, how much) his mother's opinion about a woman's place is connected to Kazakh culture or the religious influence of Islam.

Just as his mother's opinion about a woman's place is contradicted through her legendary ancestresses, Jadiger's statement that he condones gender-equality is

[141] Ibid., 300. "Oral creative folk work, especially poetic legends, have for the nomads not only an aesthetic, but also an educational, and more precisely, a historical value. From the rich, eventful past, the people preserve in their memory only what the descendants can draw **moral and social lessons** from."

contradicted through the preceding encounter with Bakisat. In this scene, Jadiger has just returned from the fishing aul after their successful catch, a month after he had promised Bakisat that he would be back the next day. While the timeline is not very specific as to how much time has passed between this moment and the night that Jadiger physically attacked Bakisat, the reader has already encountered this scene of domestic violence. When Jadiger returns from his last trip,[142] neither Bakisat nor her daughter are happy to see him - which Jadiger, at first, does not notice at all. Despite the fact that he announces to his mother that he supports gender-equality, his behaviour towards Bakisat betrays his deeply rooted patriarchal conception of the relationship between women and men. In order to give a better understanding of their dynamic in this scene, I am quoting their interaction at length. Here, the daughter has already run off to her classes, leaving Bakisat and Jadiger alone:

> **[Р]обко** глянул на нее; **робко** положил ей на плечо ладонь. **Вопреки твоему ожиданию, Бакизат не противилась**, проявляя **несвойственную ей покорность**, и **молча** стояла **под тяжестью** твоей натруженной огромной руки. **На душе у тебя стало тепло**. Робкая рука, **осмелев** теперь, потянула к себе Бакизат, которая **стояла к тебе боком**, все еще храня **бесстрастный**, **отчужденный вид**; и на этот раз она **не противилась,** весь ее вид, **казалось**, выражал **готовность безропотно подчиниться** любому желанию бедолаги-мужа. **И потому, на тебя вдруг нашло успокоение**. [...] вдруг кровь, воспламеняясь в жилах, мгновенно ударила в голову, и ты, **больше не в силах сдержать свою страсть**, рывком привлек ее к себе. **Бакизат оставалась безучастной**; лишь чуть откинув голову, подставила для поцелуя **бледное**, **бескровное лицо**; ты тут же склонился к ней, потянулся было губами к ее лицу - и вздрогнул, вдруг невзначай, краем глаза, **глянув в зеркало**; а там, в зеркале, какой-то

[142] It is literally his last trip, because several days later Bakisat tells him that she is leaving him for Azim. That same night the three of them are trapped together on the floating ice.

> огромный детина с темным, заросшим густой щетиной лицом, склонился над молодой женщиной, которая, **подчиняясь супружескому долгу, покорно** подставляет свое потухшее лицо; **ты резко отстранился** от нее; Бакизат тут же вся **подобралась**; словно **обрадованная** тем, что **удалось выскользнуть** из крепких объятий сильного мужчины, она **молча**, **дробно** цокая каблуками по дощатому полу, **мгновенно пробежала до двери**.[143] (74f.)

I think this scene speaks for itself. It obviously depicts a woman who is scared and only accepts his advances because she does not know how to avoid them. In light of the fact that Jadiger has already once used violence against her because she was evading sex with him, it is pretty clear that she fears a repetition of this violence. Despite the fact that the scene is told from Jadiger's point of view, Bakisat's emotional reaction is clearly visible through words like "under the weight," as well as the description of Bakisat's "impassive, estranged air". The first present a clear focalisation through Bakisat, emphasising her feelings through her perception of the heaviness of Jadiger's hand, while the latter is an objective description of the scene, i.e. a zero-focalisation. Even though the second-person narrator depicts Jadiger's point of view and the narrative is clearly focalised through

[143] "**Shyly** glanced at her; **shyly** laid a hand on her shoulder. **Against your expectation, Bakisat did not resist**, displaying a **submissiveness that was uncharacteristic of her,** and **silently** stood **under the weight** of your huge, outworn hand. **You started feeling warm inside** [lit: In your soul/heart it became warm.]. The shy hand, growing bolder now, pulled closer Bakisat who **was standing sideways to you**, still maintaining an **impassive, estranged air**; and once again she **did not resist**, her entire appearance, **it seemed**, expressed the **readiness to submit without a murmur** to any wish of the wretched husband. **And therefore you were suddenly filled with calmness**. [...] suddenly the blood, firing up in your veins hit your head in an instant and you, **no longer able to control your passion**, jerkily drew her towards you. **Bakisat remained unresponsive**; only slightly turning down her head, offering her **pale, bloodless face** for a kiss; you immediately bend to her, you were about to reach her face with your lips - and you startled, suddenly by chance out of the corner of your eye **having caught sight of the mirror**; and there, in the mirror, some huge, husky lad with a dark face, overgrown with thick bristles, was bending down to a young woman who, **submitting to the marital duty**, **obediently** offers her dead face; **you abruptly turned away** from her; Bakisat immediately **straightened up**; as if **cheering up** because she **had managed to slip out** of the tight embrace of the strong man; she **silently**, clicking **in staccato** with her heels over the timbered floor, **at once ran towards the door.**"

Jadiger, here the narrator adds information that Jadiger does not perceive. Thereby the narrative creates a distance between what Jadiger feels and what the reader perceives. This distance produces the effect that the reader empathises with Bakisat in this scene. Despite the fact that Bakisat is not actually speaking here, her emotions are transmitted through the narrative style itself, while zero-focalisation words provide a cinematographic zoom-out of the scene. This zoom-out is then doubled in the narrative through Jadiger's alienation from himself as he sees himself in the mirror and does not recognise the man in the mirror as himself.

The scene is furthermore revealing of Jadiger's personality and his conception of women's rights. The sentence "against your expectation, Bakisat did not resist" clearly represents Jadiger's point of view. He recognises that Bakisat's submissiveness is "**uncharacteristic of her**" He is relieved and feels warm inside, not because he mistakes her silence for consent, but because she submissively obeys him. Thus, while he contends to support gender-equality, he does no accept a woman's right to sexual self-determination. This is expressed both in his physical attack on Bakisat when she is avoiding sex, as well as in this scene. The kind of wife that he always wanted is actually one who fulfils his every wish and does not deny him sex. This is also reflected towards the end of the novel. As Bakisat realises that Azim has left her, she turns toward Jadiger and wants to take care of him, and Jadiger finally receives what he had longed for: "Такое **трепетное, неподдельное внимание**, которого он так ждал всю свою жизнь"[144] (333). Indeed, he is not so similar from Azim, who sees his wife more like a

[144] "Such a tender, sincere attention which he had so waited for his entire live."

servant than an equal partner.

What saves Bakisat in the scene above is Jadiger's confrontation with his own reflection in the mirror where he sees himself as huge man leaning over a young woman who is obeying her "marital duty". It is this artificial view from outside that alienates him from his own actions and stops him from raping her. She flees without uttering a word, which is emphasised through the staccato sound of her heels, pointing towards the speed with which she rather runs than walks away. What this showcases is how Jadiger clearly represents both sovietisation as well as a patriarchal structure of family life. Of course, these two elements do not actually present a contradiction. The Soviet ideal of women, particularly since Stalin, is often described as imposing a "double burden" on women, namely to fulfil both the traditional role of women as mothers and care-givers *and* the traditional role of men as workers in the labour force:

> In the Soviet Union, women have double tasks. They are expected to work as hard as men in offices, factories, and in the fields. Then after coming home, they have to spend several hours a day shopping, cooking, and cleaning because Soviet men (to preserve their masculinity) refuse to help their wives in household duties.[145]

Similarly, Bakisat had to fulfil both her role as a teacher, as well as child-rearing and housework. Jadiger, however, does not only want a wife who is both labourer and care-giver, he also wants an obedient and submissive wife. In order to more fully understand these conflicting positions in relation to women's rights, I want to broaden my discussion on gender through a historical and cultural contextualisation.

[145] See Alice Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality," *The Russian Review (Stanford)* 30, no. 3 (1971): 266.

3.3. Women in the Soviet Union and Central Asia

In 1930, it was declared that the woman's question had been successfully solved in the Soviet Union, even though only several years earlier, in 1927, a massive campaign for women's emancipation in Central Asia had been launched: the unveiling campaign. What sticks out in this paradoxon is Stalin's readiness to employ feminism as a tool of liberation in Central Asia, while Bolshevik Feminists like Alexandra Kollontai's struggle for women's rights within the Bolshevik party was often completely dismissed. Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks made the very question they had supposedly already solved in the Russian mainland into the heart of their revolutionary restructuring of Central Asian societies. Feminism itself is often used in order to carry out a "civilising mission" under another name, and the Soviet example is not an exception. Despite their self-proclaimed feminist agenda, the emancipation of women was not their main focus. It was merely a means to an end. The goal was to break up the kinship-based tribal system of Central Asian societies through the disruption of the core family structure. This reflects a rather delicate problem, namely the way in which "foreign powers instrumentalise the oppression of the ethnically and/or religious 'other' woman to justify neo-imperial projects. The same strategy was used earlier to justify colonialism." (238), as Michelle Hartman explains.[146]

As Massell points out, for lack of a 'real' proletariat in Central Asia, the Soviet

[146] Michelle Hartman. "Literary Studies," in *Women and Islamic Cultures. Disciplinary Paradigms and Approaches: 2003-2013*, ed. Suad Joseph (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 238.

regime needed another group of people that could fulfil the same social role as the proletariat:

> Moslem women came to constitute, in Soviet political imagination, a structural weakpoint in the traditional order: a potentially deviant and hence subversive stratum susceptible to militant appeal - in effect, a *surrogate proletariat* where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed. Through that weakpoint, it was thought, particularly intense conflicts could be engendered in society and leverage provided for its disintegration and subsequent reconstitution. (xxiii, Massel's emphasis)

As can be seen, the Soviet endeavour was to break up traditional social ties in order to build a new social world, a world in which Soviet ideology would determine peoples' lives and believes instead of any other cultural traditions. Therefore it is impossible to discuss the oppression of women in Central Asia without taking into account the oppression of the ethnic 'other'. It is only through the lens of intersectionality[147] that the problem can be understood in depth. Interestingly, during Soviet times, the Zhenotdel was actually aware of the intersection of gender and imperial oppression. In fact, the difference between Russia and Central Asia was openly recognised, which led to the conclusion that the revolutionary approach to restructuring the society needed to be different, too. As Douglas Northrop has shown, in 1926, the Zhenotdel in Tashkent (Uzbek SSR) proposed an analysis of the situation that can be described as intersectional:

> Local society was patriarchal, and **gender conflict coexisted in complicated ways with colonial conflict.** Many **Muslim women**, the Zhenotdel reasoned, were forced to stay hidden in public and secluded at home, and hence saw themselves as **victims of indigenous men, not just of the Russian colonial state**. (11)

[147] See my explanation in the Introduction, 21.

What is stressed here is the double oppression of women - both in terms of gender and colonialism.

Of course, the Soviet analysis of the intersection of colonial and gender oppressions disregards the position of the Soviet Union itself as imperial power. This can be seen in their hegemonial power to define the spaces (cultural and physical) where, according to them, oppression takes place, as well as the remedies. The unveiling campaign in and of itself only reacted to a visual phenomenon. Muslim women themselves were perceived as particularly 'backward' because Islam itself was conceptualised as monolithic and per se oppressive of women. This, however, disregards the development of a progressive Jadidist movement within Islam in the early 20th century. The Jadidists argued that Islam and modernism do not contradict each other. They also positively influenced women's lives, and many women were able to get an education and become teachers through Jadidist reforms.[148] The Soviet imagination of Islam also disregards that Islam took on a different form in nomadic societies as in sedentary ones. In fact, nomadic women, traditionally, did not wear a veil at all.

In stark contrast to the general Soviet perception of Central Asian women, *Last Respects* depicts a nuanced differentiation that points towards the heterogeneity of Kazakh society. While the memory of the warrior women of the Tleu-Kabak clan implies the relative freedom of Kazakh women before sovietisation, it also serves to show a negative development in terms of women's rights. This is made particularly visible through Azim's wife. Instead of an equal partner, he treats her like a servant, which

[148] See Yulia Gradskova, "Opening the (Muslim) woman's space. The Soviet politics of emancipation in the 1920s-930s," *Ethnicities* 20, no. 4 (2020): 669; 681.

becomes obvious when he addresses her directly: "Приготовь мне одежду!"[149] (273). Even though Azim stages himself as the progressive Soviet academic with European habits and plays the perfect gentlemen in fine clothes, drawing the attention and admiration of women, in his relation towards his wife he displays his despotic nature:

> Жена никогда не ложилась до твоего возвращения. Даже и тогда, когда ты, проведя ночь с любовницей приходил под утро, она **не смела** ложиться и ждала, сидя у двери на стуле, борясь со сном. Она никогда ни о чем **не расспрашивала**. Лишь однажды **осмелилась** спросить: - Не страшно, когда **ходите** по ночам? - Я что, по-**твоему**, в бирюльки играю? - **буркнул** ты и, не задерживаясь, прошел в комнату. [...] Она всегда **старалась** поменьше **попадаться** тебе на глаза. А когда ты бывал дома, вовсе не вылезала из кухни, стряпала, мыла посуду, стирала.[150] (295f)

It is important to note, that he addresses her with the informal address 'ты' (informal 'you'), which is already reflected in his command 'приготовь' ('prepare,' informal), and unceremoniously "barks" angrily at her. In stark contrast to this, she addresses him with the formal "ходите" ('go', formal address). His wife's behaviour is dictated by fear and submission, which can be seen on the lexical level through the verbs that describe her actions, she doesn't "dare," doesn't "ask" him, and "strives/endeavours" to not "appear in front of" his eyes, meaning she tries to avoid him whenever possible. He, in fact, is in possession of the 'submissive' wife that Jadiger wants.

[149] "Prepare my clothes!"

[150] "[Your] wife never went to bed before your return. Even then, when you, spending the night with a lover, arrived in the early morning hours, she **did not dare** to lie down and waited, sitting by the door on a chair, fighting against sleep. She **never asked** about anything. Only once she **dared** to ask: - Aren't you scared when **you [formal address] walk** at night? - So I, according to **you**, am busy with mere trifles? - you **barked** and, without lingering, entered your room. [...] She always **tried** to **appear** in front of your eyes as little as possible. And when you were at home she did not get out of the kitchen at all, was cooking, washing dishes and clothes."

Instead of presenting submissive housewives through legends and songs, Jadiger's ancestresses are depicted as energetic warrior-women. This disrupts two stereotypes about Central Asia: Firstly, the idea that all Muslim societies are less 'developed' in terms of women's rights, and secondly, that sovietisation brought emancipation to Muslim women. The latter is especially visible in the stark contrast between the warrior-women and Azim's wife. Of course, Soviet marriage laws and, particularly, the right to divorce was a major achievement. This is development is symbolised through Bakisat, a self-confident and athletic[151] teacher, who divorces her husband. Indeed, Bakisat symbolises both, a connection to Kazakh tradition with their horse-riding warrior-women, as well as the partially progressive influence of sovietisation on the status of women.

In many ways, Nurpeisov's novel points precisely towards the interrelatedness of oppressions and thus presents an intersectional analysis of oppression. Thereby, he avoids simplifying the complex social structures and hierarchies but presents them in their complexity. This is accomplished largely through the peculiarity of narrative style and content. As I have pointed out, the narrative style mirrors the narrative content and both, through their logical 'inconsistencies' depict a heterogeneous social fabric that cannot be reduced to one consistent point of view on any of the issues raised (i.e. questions about gender, nature, cultural imperialism etc.). The novel is thereby able to depict the many contradictory opinions that exist not only within one society, but also within one person.

[151] In one side-plot, several young Kazakhs are racing each other on a trip. Bakisat runs faster then all other girls, while Jadiger is the fastest of the boys. The last race is between the two of them and the reader witnesses Jadiger's incredulity at Bakisat's speed, as she easily outruns him.

The latter is emphasised, for example, through Jadiger. The narrative problematises how Jadiger's environmental consciousness is complicated through the way in which he has internalised Moscow's imperial logic. Bakisat, in turn, is oppressed through exactly this combination of environmentalism and the internalisation of the quota-logic by Jadiger. Her husband is always running about, either to talk to his superiors about the Aral Sea crisis, or to help his fisherman gain an advantage over the other fishing kolkhozes, but never has time for his family. Another aspect that is represented through multivocality is Kazakh environmentalism. In the following, I want to take a closer look at some characters in the novel who represent the rich fabric of Kazakh environmentalism on the intra-textual layer. Then, I will present a closer analysis of Bakisat's situation, both in relation to Jadiger, and Azim. My focus will be on the way in which Bakisat's oppression by both men is paralleled structurally and symbolically through the men's interaction with and opinions about the Aral Sea. This symbolic connection between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women is, however, not a simple, straightforward parallel but a complicated mixture of analyses about both nature and gender that reflect the general multifaceted range of opinions and points of view.

IV. KAZAKH ENVIRONMENTALISMS

4.1. Discursive and Active Environmentalisms

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon showed that environmentalism is not an exclusive practice of the upper- and middle-classes, but also occurs amongst the poor. He explains:

> As such, impoverished resource rebels can seldom afford to be single-issue activists: their green commitments are seamed through with other economic and cultural causes as they experience environmental threat not as a planetary abstraction but as a set of **inhabited risks**, some imminent, others obscurely long term. (4)

In his book, Nixon describes several of these "empty-belly"[152] environmentalisms. Similarly to those described by Nixon, the first Kazakh environmental movement began to form in the late 1980s in response to very real "inhabited risks": The anti-nuclear Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement, named after the coalition of environmentalist activists against the nuclear testing sites in the U.S. and the USSR. The novel, however, takes place around the late 60s to mid 70s and is thus set at a time that precedes any form of organised protest. In the novel, there is no local movement that addresses the Aral Sea crisis, despite the fact that the disaster unfolds in plain sight. The communal inaction points to the destruction of the traditional social structure of Kazakhs through Soviet modernisation campaigns like the sedentarisation campaign which provoked a devastating famine. Another aspect is the sovietisation of the population. This finds

[152] The terms "full-stomach" and "empty-belly" environmentalism were coined by Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 5.

expression in the prevalence of the Russian language and the general belief in the Soviet endeavour by a generation who was born and raised in the Soviet Union. Belief in the Soviet endeavour also legitimised nuclear testing in Semipalatinsk, even in the local population, as Hamid Ismailov depicts in *Вундеркинд Ержан* (trans. *The Dead Lake,* 2014). In Ismailov's novel, a character who works at the testing site is proud of his work and argues that it is necessary to defend the Soviet Union against the U.S. as well as to advance technological progress in order to outdo the West.

Both sovietisation and the dissolving of tribal ties present an obstacle to local protest movements. Instead of organising a protest, the characters in the novel simply move away in large numbers. Others, like Jadiger who is trying to alert his supervisors to the crisis, do not realise that their own efforts to fulfil quotas for fishing is part of the very system of modernisation and industrialisation that made it necessary to sacrifice the sea for cotton production.

While Jadiger pleads with his superiors to take the Aral Sea crisis seriously, he nonetheless pacifies three elderly fishermen who turn to him to express their concerns about the rapid desiccation of the sea. Instead of recognising their struggle openly and encouraging them to find a means of resistance, he dismisses them with shallow phrases and false consolations he does not believe in himself. At their first visit, Jadiger tells them not to worry because the Aral Sea has historically sometimes shallowed, at other times grown.[153] The second time around he tells them of a plan to redirect Siberian rivers to the Aral in order to stabilise the sea level. The third time they return he does not know what

[153] It is true that the sea level of the Aral Sea often heavily fluctuated. In 1960 the sea level was, historically speaking, exceptionally high.

else to tell them and merely says that he will carefully examine the matter. This episode is interesting because it depicts the inadequacy of bureaucracy and shows the circularity of the problem. While Jadiger is dismissed by his supervisors, he, in turn, dismisses his people. Additionally, the scene shows that his main concern is not their distress, but his own distress at the rapid rate with which people are leaving the area: "Если уж покинут эти трое насиженные дедовские места, то край наверняка лишится своей последней опоры."[154] (224). This again displays how much Jadiger has been influenced by sovietisation because he perceives his cultural heritage as Kazakh to be a primarily sedentary form of life, centred on a particular location.

Indeed, the argument that there is no environmental movement in the local population is based on the way in which environmental resistance is conceptualised in sedentary societies. The traditional life-style of Kazakhs, pastoral nomadism, however uses quite different strategies in reaction to threats. As Cameron argues in *The Hungry Steppe*, "flight [is] a strategy that pastoral nomads [of Central Asia] often used in case of unfavorable political or environmental conditions." (93). She furthermore describes pastoral nomadism in Central Asia as historically neither "timeless nor unchanging" (23). What this means is that the people in the Central Asian steppe adapted their habits and lifestyles in the face of social, political and/or environmental threats. Pastoral nomads do not only, and not always, utilise long-distance migrations, but also seasonal migrations, depending on the available resources as well as the climate of the region at a given time. In Central Asia, pastoral nomadism also included strategies like crop cultivation and

[154] "If already these three leave the familiar, grandfatherly place then the region will probably lose it's last support."

hunting. People might even settle down, become semi-sedentary and focus on agriculture. This however, was not a 'progress' from one form of civilisation to another. It was simply a survival strategy. When environmental conditions and/or the socio-political situation changed they simply turned to other nomadic strategies (see 23f.).

During the confiscation campaign, as well as in reaction to the famine, many nomads chose their traditional strategy of flight and left the Kazakh steppe for e.g. China or hid in the mountains. Seen in this light, the novel does depict a communal reaction of protest to the environmental degradation of the Aral Sea region into an almost uninhabitable area: in one day alone, 25 families move away (see 79ff.). Another element that hints at nomadic traditions is *how* they leave "не заколачивали, как другие, брошенные дома, а собрав матицы, двери, рамы, кояки - все что могла пригодиться в будущем на незнакомом новом месте, увозили с собой."[155] (80). Similarly, pastoral nomads who "lived in a dwelling that could be collapsed and transported easily, such as a tent or a yurt"[156] took with them their belongings when they left the area.

Another element of local resistance is expressed through conversations and depicts local knowledge as valid and comprehensive of the local environment. This critique is presented by Jadiger's mother:

> [Жадигер:] Но вот послушай, один **большой ученый** недавно доказал, что уровень моря и подземных вод всегда зависят друг от друга. [Мать:] - Сказал тоже! Это и мы, **неученые аульные бабы**, знаем. [...] Если они такие всевидящие, скажи, почему не видят, как тут дети и бабы все лето, громыхая ведрами, мечутся по степи в поисках воды для питья.[157] (96)

[155] "[N]ot tearing down, like others, the abandoned houses, but having gathered girders, doors, frames and stakes - everything that might be useful in the future at a new, unknown place, they carried it away."

[156] Cameron, 23.

[157] " [Jadiger:] But, listen, one important scientist has recently proven that the levels of the sea and the

Here, local knowledge is accorded an intrinsic value in determining local environmental problems, while the scientific community is characterised as lacking that direct connection to the places they study. Thus, while scientists require research, the aul women have access to the same knowledge through their intuitive understanding of their environment. Kazakh local knowledge is also given validity in another scene where Jadiger remembers what 'grey-bearded old men' used to say: "К концу света в недрах земных **иссякнет вода**, девушки на юношах повиснут без стыда"[158] (128). Here, water and women are depicted as parallel and as similarly indicative of the end of the world. The change in women is seen as a moral issue that insists on a sexist conception of the proper behaviour of women. Lack of shame in women is equated with lack of water on the earth. This is of particular interest because Bakisat defines her own behaviour as "shameless" (see Chapter 1). I will discuss this connection between women and nature and how they relate to each other in more detail below. Here, I want to draw attention to the direct connection between the destruction of the world and the absence of water:

> Не это ли **начало того конца света**, о котором они не перестают твердить? [...] Выходит, сивобородные аульные старцы, над которыми обычно **мы** посмеиваемся, всегда знали, **что жизнь на земле поддерживается прежде всего воздухом и водой**?! Не предостережением ли былы с их стороны извечные напоминания - **беречь**, как зеницу ока, **эти два божьих дара**?[159] (128f.)

underground waters always depend on each other. [Mother:] - He said so! This much also we, the uneducated aul women know. [...] If they are so all-seeing, tell me, why do they not see how, here, the children and women, rattling with buckets, are rushing about the steppe in the search of drinking water."

158 "Towards the end of the world the water in the bowels of the earth will **dry up**, girls will cling to young lads without shame."

159 "Isn't this **the beginning of this end of the world** about which they never stop repeating? [...] It turns out, the grey-bearded aul elders about whom **we** usually poke fun at always knew that **live on earth is maintained above all with air and water**??! Wasn't this their warning, these eternal reminders to

Both in this scene, as well as in the mother's logical reasoning, religion is an important factor. What stands out in terms of environmental thought is the idea that the environmental catastrophe is also a moral one: It is due to human neglect, because "we" (мы) no longer protect/guard neither water nor air that the world will end. The narrative switch from third-person narrative to second-person plural stands out in contrast to the rest of the narrative and draws a connection to the second-person plural narrative at the very end of the Azim focalisation (See Chapter One, 40). "We" encompasses not only characters in the novel, the narrator, but also the reader, the author and humanity in its entirety. "We" means all of us.

The direct relation between the disappearance of water and the end of the world furthermore suggests the interconnectedness of local problems with global ones. This circularity of causation is also hinted at through the symbolic meaning of imported clothes. They represent the luxury of the capital, Azim's worldly and amorous success, as well as Bakisat's preference for Azim over Jadiger. Luxury itself is the enchanting mirage of the splendours of the capital, which Azim promises will also exist in the new white city he wants to build on the bottom of the sea. Of course, Bakisat can be seen as symbolising the craving for luxury, however, when Azim tells her about his grand plans, her first question is: "А скажи, у нас тоже будет, как и в столице, **горячая вода**?"[160] (248). This shows clearly, that her dream is not luxury but a more comfortable life - hot water can hardly be described as luxury. The aul, however, does not have hot water. In connection to Jadiger's mother's criticism that there isn't even enough potable water, the

safeguard these two godly gifts like the apple of one's eye?"

160 "Tell me, will we also have, like the capital, **hot water**?"

aul is rather presented as lacking the basic standard of living the capital provides and thus, Bakisat's desire to move to the capital does not surprise. After all, during her student years she had lived in Alma-Ata and has is familiar with both life in the aul and life in the capital.

The circularity of causation between imported clothes and the Aral is further emphasised through an extra-textual layer that does not find direct expression the novel. The Aral sea is shallowing because waters from the rivers are used to irrigate the dry soil of Central Asia. This is done in order to produce cotton, which can be exported and exchanged for the multiple amount of grain. Abroad, this cotton is needed for the production of clothes, which are then bought (by Azim), either on trips abroad, or as imported products, and presented to women (Bakisat) in order to charm them. These clothes are desired (by Bakisat) because they are a symbol of the luxury Azim can provide. Bakisat craves this splendour of the capital because of her own living situation: life in a disintegrating fishing aul. The luxury of the capital epitomises for her, as well as for many others, simply a better standard of life.

To put this into historical and global context that still impacts us today, I'd like to add the following. In a recent BBC documentary, Stacey Dooley travelled to the Aral Sea to film the salty steppe for *Fashion's Dirty Secrets* (2018), a film about the devastating environmental impact of massive, unsustainable, cotton production. Thereby, a direct link is established between the Central Asian catastrophe and the global demand for cheap clothes en masse. This part of the global dimension is not depicted in the novel. The connection to fashion and, particularly, to our contemporary "fast fashion," illuminates

the nexus between extensive mass production and environmental impact.[161]

While the novel does not directly remark upon this connection, it nonetheless envisages environmental problems in terms of human problems. Environmental degradation is, indeed, a moral issue and is mirrored in humanity's moral degradation. Thus, Jadiger's mother exclaims: "Вы полоняетесь железу и зависите кругом от железа, где уж там сыскать место для **человеческого милосердия**?"[162] (94). However, there is also scientific criticism that neither relies on a religious belief system, nor on a causal relationship between morality and sustainability but nonetheless comes to the same conclusion, the same warning, and comprehends the Aral Sea crisis in the context of a greater, global, environmental catastrophe. At the conference that presents Azim's map, an unnamed scientist argues:

> [А]бсолютно убежден, что современный научно-технический прогресс, который работает на разрушение природы, не остановится, пока не истребит само человечество. [Он] уже нарушил удивительную гармонию природы, царившую со времен сотворения мира. Теперь смертельная угроза нависла над **всем миром**. Вон, **умирает Аральское море**.[163] (293)

While Jadiger's mother understands the catastrophe as a moral issue and views it under the lense of Islam, the scientist points towards the "scientific-technological progress" as

[161] About the environmental impact of the fashion industry: Morgan McFall-Johnsen, "The fashion industry emits more carbon than international flights and maritime shipping combined. Here are the biggest ways it impacts the planet," last modified October 21, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.de/international/fast-fashion-environmental-impact-pollution-emissions-waste-water-2019-10/?r=US&IR=T.

[162] "You are becoming captive to iron and totally depend on iron; where is there still to be found a place for human mercy?"

[163] "I am completely convinced that the contemporary scientific-technological progress, which is working on the destruction of nature, will not stop until it annihilates humanity itself. [It] has already destroyed the wondrous harmony of nature which had reigned since the time of the creation of the world. Now, a deathly threat was hanged over **the whole world**. There - **the Aral sea is dying**."

the problem.[164] At another conference,[165] another unnamed scientist proclaims: "Само существование человечества в будущем в прямой **зависимости** от того, быть или не быть здоровой и чистой природе"[166] (125). Jadiger applauds excitedly, showing that he also believes that humanity's existence depends on the earth and whether or not it is inhabitable for humans.

The novel does not only depict humanity's dependence on nature, but also that we are a part of nature. In an argument with Azim, Jadiger exclaims "а народ - это ведь тоже часть природы"[167] (213), objecting to the (anthropocentric) idea that humans are beings apart from nature, which is often expressed through the so-called nature-culture dichotomy. This is further underlined by the style of writing itself. Nurpeisov makes extensive use of comparisons to describe the behaviour of people, in particular, through comparison between humans and other animals. There are particular animals that turn up a lot, especially camels and dog-puppies, but also wolves, fish and ants. These comparisons are used in order to portray negative as well as positive character traits.

Human dependence on nature is expressed also through the reaction of the inhabitants of the aul to the desiccation of the sea. As the sea begins to dry up, people also start moving away. This shows how much humans depend on a specific environment, without which they cannot survive. The Aral Sea is furthermore personified

[164] To me, the equation of moral and environmental degradation is slightly problematic because it assumes that something inherently has changed in people that has led to environmental catastrophes, while the focus on technological progress seems one-sided. I would suggest that the problem lies more in the combination of technological possibility and social, political as well as economic ideologies. However, due to lack of space I am unable to fully discuss this question here.

[165] Jadiger visits this conference and Azim presides over it. Chronologically, the event takes place before the conference mentioned above.

[166] "The existence of humanity itself will in the future directly depend on whether or not there will be a healthy and clean nature."

[167] "But the people - this is after all also a part of nature."

in order to emphasise that the natural resources are also alive: The desiccating sea itself is compared to a dying person. This liveliness is also foregrounded through descriptions of nature and the atmosphere in the icy steppe. These discriptions are not made from a human point of view as such, but rather from a dislocated 'other' that observes, e.g. Jadiger, the bent man who is standing in a vast sea of snow; or that suddenly hears a "woman's cry" as does the narrative voice in the beginning of the second part. Rather than describing nature from a human point of view, it seems that nature is describing itself, or that a cinematic shot from the air is depicting the character(s) below. Indeed, through the inclusion of the wolf as focalizer, as well as the constant comparisons between humans and animals, the differentiation between what is 'human' and what 'animal' is undermined. Instead, they are presented as a continuum, as belonging to the same natural sphere. The comparisons between them are no mere stylistic comparisons, but point towards what all have in common: feelings of belonging, love and pain.

This connection between humans and nature is also expressed through an extra-textual, lexically marked, symbolic parallelisation of Bakisat and the Aral Sea. Thus, Nurpeisov presents an environmental criticism that can be read as ecofeminist. In the following section, I will describe both the depiction of women in relation to animals and then draw attention to how Bakisat and the Aral sea are paralleled through the way in which both Azim and Jadiger relate to them. Thereby I argue that the text performs an eco-criticism that highlights how gender oppression and the oppression of nature resemble each other.

4.2. Parallels and Mirrors as Environmentalism: Azim-Jadiger-Bakisat-Aral

Even though Jadiger and Azim represent two contrasting opposites, they lexically and situationally mirror each other throughout the novel, particularly so in their behaviour towards both Bakisat and the Aral Sea. There are many textual markers that connect Azim and Jadiger. This happens mostly on a lexical level, i.e. the textual connection between them is established through the usage of exactly the same, or very similar word(s) that either describe them, or their interpretation of the world. Thus, their loneliness and their sense of isolation from others is represented through the word "один-одинешенек"[168] they are both described with (Jadiger, e.g. 16; Azim, 308). In a feeling of desperation they both exclaim: "О, глупец! Глупец!"[169] (Jadiger: 234; Azim: 313). In another case their wording differs only slightly while retaining enough similarity for a direct connection: "верно сказано: **конец жизни** у человека - что **изодранная псами старая овчина**"[170] (315), exclaims Azim,[171] while the third-person focalizer Jadiger thinks "выглядит эта **жизнь** к **концу** как **старая овчина**, **изодранная псами**"[172] (349).

Another technique used to parallel them is their experiences. Both of them suffer from insomnia and nightmares, Jadiger because he feels impotent at the looming desiccation of the Aral Sea, Azim because he feels helpless in the light of his social and political demise. Azim dreams of a black spider that resembles some "bureaucrat"

168 "Utterly alone."
169 "Oh, [you] fool! [You] fool!"
170 "It was said correctly: the **end** of a person's **life** is [like], **teared up by dogs, old sheepskin**."
171 In this particular moment, Azim's thoughts are quoted with quotation marks.
172 "Towards the **end,** this **life** looks like an **old sheepskin, teared up by dogs**."

("чинуш[а]", 273), while Jadiger dreams of the legendary Kok Oguz, a huge bull who drinks up the sea (see 54). While nightmares depict their struggles with reality, they are also paralleled through one particular negative coping mechanism. Even though they both dislike vodka, in a moment of intense dissatisfaction (Jadiger) and despair (Azim) they both turn towards alcohol. Jadiger because his wife is evading sex with him (see 200), Azim because he lost both his job and party membership (see 296). One other parallel deserves mentioning because it points towards their respective relationship with nature. In a moment of despair both of them encounter a tree. Azim encounters a tree on his way home from the meeting where he was confronted by party officials and was disbanded from his job. In his despair he leans against the tree and cries, finding relief and comfort not in the tree itself but in the action of leaning against something that supports him (see 295). While studying in Alma-Ata, Jadiger encounters a tree. This scene happens after he had been evading both Azim and Bakisat for several months because he had felt hurt by the way in which Azim had mocked him. When he sees the tree, its vitality brightens his spirits, he leans back against the tree and is happy (see 148). In contrast to Azim, who sees in the tree only something that can be of use to him, Jadiger recognises the vitality, the joy of life that is expressed through the blooming tree and experiences joy at the sight of the tree.[173]

One more point that deserves mentioning in this context is the sometimes misogynistic implications which are expressed in sentences like: "На той **земле**, которая

[173] Next to the invocation of Suleimenov, this is the only time in the novel that another author is mentioned: Tolstoi. The tree is described as similar to "Tolstoi's oak" (148). This is a reference to Tolstoi's novella "Три смерти" (Three Deaths), which compares the deaths of a noblewoman to that of a peasant and a tree. The reference emphasises Jadiger's feeling that nature itself teaches us about life and death and that a connection to nature also brings calmness and acceptance.

с самого сотворения своего была, подобно **разгульной бабе**, средоточием **непостоянства, измены и лжи.**"[174] (234). Here the comparison between earth and woman parallel them in a negative way. Because this sentence appears in a section that is focalised through Jadiger, it stands to reason that this also expresses his point of view. Indeed the entire text is full of scenes in which misogynistic or sexist opinions are expressed and men's relation towards women is often depicted through an objectifying male gaze. Since Jadiger and Azim are the main male focalizers, this is primarily expressed through their treatment of and thoughts about women. A closer analysis of their general attitude towards women will show their similarities and differences in this regard.

Jadiger often essentialises women and conceptualises 'woman' as homogenous identity, as in the quote from above. This seems particularly connected to his frustration and distress about his wife's infidelity towards him. Just as the earth is compared to a cheating woman, so the entire world is compared to what is considered immoral behaviour in women:

> А чего ему пугаться и чего жалеть, если тот **лживый мир** не дороже той **заурядной шлюхи**, которая, переспав ночь с мужчиной, вскакивает поутру с постели и, наспех подмывшись, убирается восвояси, беспечно виляя задом.[175] (337)

It's not quite clear whether he is talking about a prostitute or about a 'promiscuous' woman.[176] The main element, however, is the imagined joy with which this woman leaves

[174] "On this earth which was, since creation itself, just like a debaucherous woman, the location of inconstancy, betrayal and falsehood."

[175] "But what is there to be frightened of or to feel sorry about if this deceitful world is no better than that mediocre whore who, after having spent the night with a man, jumps out of bed in the morning and, having hurriedly cleaned herself, clears off to whence she came from, carelessly wagging her bottom."

[176] It seems more likely that he talks about a promiscuous woman. While there might be prostitutes who actively choose their job, the majority do not. Most of them are victims of human trafficking and other forms of oppression including blackmailing and coercion. See "Hard Facts Prostitution," Lightup,

the man behind. There is only one person in the novel who actually behaves like this: Azim. He describes how he excitedly enters a building for a meeting, "словно только что **высвободившись** из объятий девушки, с радостно бьющимся серцем"[177] (283). The word, "высвободившись" (having gotten free from) emphasises both the joy he feels as well as his general disinterest for the woman he leaves behind. This is expressed even more openly, when he thinks about the people he likes to flatter: "А если и **льстил** еще кому-нибудь [кроме Большому Человеку], то **легковерным женщинам**, да и то лишь в порыве страсти, **до постели**"[178] (312). What this accomplishes is to move the discussion about promiscuity away from women and onto men. Azim's emphasis on "credulous women," indicates that he is taking advantage of them quite consciously because he flatters them with a particular goal in mind.

Through Azim the reader also witnesses the objectification of women. While being driven to a meeting, Azim sees a woman in the street and gapes at her. From his male gaze, the narrative shifts to describe the woman's reaction who has noticed his stare:

> [И] вдруг, почувствовав на себе твой **жадный** взгляд, девушка оглянулась - и заметила сначала машину, лишь потом тебя. Черные и влажные, как у **лани**, глаза ее на мгновение **замерли в испуге**, а ноздри точеного носика нервно вздрогнули.[179] (278)

Here the comparison to the fallow deer describes her situation as one of danger. To her, Azim is a predator who wants to harm her. Then, however, the narrative is focalised again

accessed May 30, 2021, https://www.lightup-movement.de/hard-facts/prostitution.

177 "As though just now **having gotten free** from the embraces of a girl, with a joyously beating heart."

178 "And if you flattered someone else [apart from the Big Person], then **credulous women**, and even that only in a gust of passion **up to the bed**."

179 "And suddenly, having felt on her your **greedy** look, the girl looked back - and noticed first the car, and only then you. Her black and moist eyes, like those of a **fallow deer**, **froze in shock** for an instance and the nostrils of her sharp little nose twitched nervously."

through Azim as her looks are described, including her clothes: "по всему видно, девушка приложила все то немыслимое **исскуство**, присущее красивым женщинам, когда они хотят **понравиться мужчинам**; и она была **скорее раздета, чем одета**[180] (ibid.).

The woman is here equated with an imagined essential identity of "beautiful women" who dress up in order to please men. While some women might do so, it does not follow that every woman chooses her clothes in order to be admired by men. The comment that she was more "undressed than dressed" implies a judgmental comment about her choice of dress, revealing that her way of dressing is very unusual. Thus, her choice of clothing could also be a sign of her own freedom of choice instead of a plot to attract the attention of men. Furthermore, it is very clear that she does not like the 'attention' of Azim, who almost runs after her:

> Еще немного - и **некая сила**, того и гляди, **вырвала** бы тебя из машины и **бросила** навтречу девушке. Она словно почувствовала это, разок-другой **зыркнула** на тебя из-под ресниц **пугливым** взглядом и, мелькнув коротеньким вспорхнувшим подолом платья, **мигом скрылась** в потоке прохожих, больше не показывалась.[181] (ibid.)

Here, Azim, like Jadiger in his remembrance of what led him to cross the ice with the truck, does not see himself as the person acting. In practical terms this means, that he would also not experience himself as responsible for what he might do, since it is not him, but some sort of exterior force that "would wrest" him out of the car, and "throw"

[180] "It was in all visible that the girl had applied all that unthinkable **art** inherent in all beautiful women when they want to **please men**; and she was rather **undressed than dressed**."

[181] "A little bit more - and **some sort of force**, it could happen any minute, would **wrest** you out of the car and **throw** you towards the girl. As though she had felt this, she once or twice **threw** a **fearful glance** at you from under her eyelashes and, with the flash of the short, fluttering hem of her dress, **disappeared in a instance** in the stream of passers-by and didn't show herself anymore."

him towards the girl.[182] The woman's reaction is prompt and efficient: She throws a glance at him and disappears in an instant. Like a deer she has sensed the danger and taken flight. Azim is either complete unaware that the unknown young woman is clearly afraid of him, or he simply does not care.

This scene is also reminiscent of, and thus presents a parallel to the scene describing the hunt of saigas, a nomadic herding antelope of the Central Asian steppe, desert and semi-desert.[183] During a very dry summer, the saigas appear near the fishing aul in large numbers. Driven by thirst, they begin drinking the salty water of the Aral, which makes them sick. The fact that these animals are well adapted to the dry climate further highlights the intense scarcity of water. The novel describes in detail their suffering from hunger and illness, but also how Sary Shaia begins killing them for their meat - only to realise that their meat tastes like the bottom of an old shoe (see 171). Despite this, he tells a group of young men stories about the wonders of their meat and the quick money that can be made from their horns.[184] He does so merely in order to gain their attention and respect. What follows are expeditions to hunt down and slaughter the already dying saigas. Here, humans are described as monsters ("чудище"/" чудовище"), while the animals "оцепенели от ужаса"[185] (172). This is reminiscent of the description

[182] In contemporary English language the very same dynamic of deflecting responsibility from men is expressed through sentences like "boys will be boys".

[183] See A.B. Bekenov, Iu. A. Grachev, and E. J. Milner-Gulland, "The Ecology and Management of the Saiga Antelope in Kazakhstan," *Mammal Review* 28, no. 1 (1998): 3.

[184] In the early 20th century, saigas were almost driven into extinction, partly because their horns could be sold for a lot of money. However, between 1930-1990 the population was relatively stable because the Soviet government regulated their commercial use. Throughout much of that time, hunting was only allowed with a license and was carried out by promkhozes, State commercial hunting organisations, see ibid., 3; 39.

[185] "Froze in terror."

of the young woman whose eyes "замерли в испуге"[186] (278).

The huntsmen also parallel the fishermen in the narrative. Due to high amounts of fresh melting water, an abundance of fish rushes to the Amu Darya river mouth (Uzbek SSR), mirrorin the saigas who were driven towards the Aral Sea in search of fresh water. The abundance of fish attracts many fishing kolkhozes who start catching and processing the fish on the spot. While the saigas were attacked greedily in the hopes of earning easy money, the fish are caught en masse because it has become difficult for the fishermen to catch fish at all and therefore they are eager to fulfil their quotas. However, they actually catch too many fish and are unable to process them quickly enough. Some of the fish begin to rot and are hurriedly buried in the sand (see 186). The fishing itself is described both as a "battle" and "slaughter" (битва, побоище, see ibid.).

While Jadiger is excited and happy about their success, there is one particular moment in which he feels with the fish themselves. As he sees a white fish lying on the sand, under her another small fish, he recognises them as the fish he had dreamed about a month earlier. In that dream he had been swimming together with the fish towards the river-mouth in search of fresh water (see 184f.). He is touched and when he notices that one of the fish is still alive, he wants to save the fish and take it back into the water (see 198). This evokes the moment when he sees a saiga trembling and breaks into tears at the sight of the animal's suffering. Indeed, he and Red-head Ivan (Рыжий Иван) are the only ones in the aul who try to stop the massacre of the saigas. These scenes make visible his complicated relationship towards nature: He wants to take care of it, handle his

[186] "Froze in shock." The two Russian verbs "оцепенеть" and "замереть" both mean "to freeze" in this context.

environment with respect and empathises with the individual animal, and sometimes even with an entire herd of saigas. However, he is also dedicated to his steady goal to fulfil the fishing quotas for Moscow, independently of the harm this might cause.

To finish the circle back to Azim, the male gaze and the young woman, Jadiger also has an encounter with a woman he desires on the riverside of the Amu Darya. The connection to the Azim-scene is established through the word "greedy" (жадно, 187), which is used in order to describe how the men look at the women. In this scene, the woman's gait is described thusly: "Как задорно ступала по усеянному чешуей берегу, **словно дразня мужчин**, поигрывая сильными бедрами."[187] (ibid.). Here, again, something as simple as a woman's way of walking is directly linked to her sexuality. This sexuality is, in turn, defined only in its function to attract men, even though she is simply carrying a stretcher with a (male) co-worker ("напарник"). This is also reflected in the description of her condescending ironic smile ("снисходительная усмешка," 187) and her reaction to Jadiger's staring: "Видно, ты чересчур долго смотрел на нее, она вся подобралась, нахмурилась, искоса сверкнула на тебя посуровевшими глазами. 'Что, и ты как все?' - почудился тебе немой укор."[188] (ibid.). Her reproachful look and her condescending ironic smile does not suggest that she is actively trying to attract the sexual attention of men, even though this is implied in the Jadiger focalised description of her. Furthermore, he interprets her stare back at him to signify that she is also interested in him, reasoning: "Но в душе ты все же понимал: если сам, со своей стороны, в

[187] "How fervently she stepped along the coast that was littered with scales, **as if teasing men**, playing with her strong hips."

[188] "Evidently you were looking at her for too long, she fully straightened up, frowned and glanced at you askance with harshened eyes. 'What, and you are like everybody else?' - seemed to you the mute reproach."

решительный момент не дрогнешь, то эта пышущая здоровьем и молодостью цветущая смуглянка и подавно не оробеет."[189] (188). However, what he describes here as mutual attraction does not seem to accord with her "mute reproach" he had noticed before. The woman is then further characterised through her behaviour: "Перехватив чужой взгляд, она, в отличие от тебя, глянула **прямо**, **смело**, и в ее черных глазах мелькнула снисходительно-лукавая, вмиг задевшая твое сердце **усмешка**."[190] (ibid.). What is different here in comparison to Azim's encounter with the unknown woman, is that while Azim is portrayed as predator who does not take his eyes off his pray, Jadiger comfortably stares at the young woman - but only so long as she does not return his gaze. Azim, on the other hand, does not wish to evade eye contact with the woman. In his case, the woman is illustrated through the shyness of her eyes that evade Azim and her immediate retreat. The woman on the beach, however, openly stares back at Jadiger and does not hide her ironic smile, which does not necessarily entail her sexual interest in Jadiger. Rather, it implies that she is used to this sort of stare. Additionally, when Jadiger diverts his gaze from her almost as soon as he meets her eyes, the hierarchy between them is reversed. What both scenes have in common, and what is especially marked in the Jadiger-scene, is the daily objectification of women irrespective of where they are (walking on the street or working).

Towards the end of the novel Jadiger's opinion of women changes twice. As he remembers his married life, he feels that he is not to blame at all, because

[189] "But in your soul you understood: if you yourself, on your part, won't shake in the decisive moment, then this health-radiating and youth-blooming swarthy girl will grow timid even less so."

[190] "Catching another's glance, she, in contrast to you, looked on directly and boldly, and in her black eyes appeared a condescending-cunning smile, instantly striking your heart."

за все тринадцать лет он ни разу ни в чем ей не перечил. Ничего для нее не жалел. Все их добро, какое ни есть, было в ее руках. Он всегда старался, как мог, приодеть, принарядить ее. Но тогда... В самом деле, тогда в чем же... В чем его вина?[191] (339)

At first, he cannot find any fault with his behaviour towards Bakisat. Then, he realises how much he has neglected her both emotionally and sexually: "В самом деле, что ты знал прежде, кроме того, чтобы ревновать ее к каждому встречному? Понимал ли ее душу? Сгорел ли ее плоть? Сумел ли ты оценить хотя бы ее женственность?"[192] (339). For the first time, he is acknowledging women as human beings with feelings who have their own mind and their own desires and argues that since their inner desire is to follow their hearts, they prefer "трепетать от страсти в объятиях молодого раба, нежел трепетать от страха в объятиях старого хана"[193] (ibid.). He comes to the following conclusion: "Так зачем же им быть рабынями наших повседневных печалей о хлебе насущном?"[194] (ibid.). This conclusion, however, does not lead to the realisation that women might have other wishes and aspirations that cannot be satisfied in the sphere they are traditionally assigned to (housework, child-rearing). Instead, he imagines women only through their relationships with men. He furthermore describes them as essentially capricious beings which carries both an essentialising and a negative connotation: "Знал ли ты о том, что женщины изначально замышлены милыми,

191 "Throughout all thirteen years he did not once cross her. For her, he spared nothing. All their belongings, whatever they were, were in her hands. He always made an effort, however he could, to dress her and to dress her well. But then... Indeed, in that case wherein... Wherein were you to blame?"

192 "Really, what did you know before except for being jealous towards any man she met? Did you understand her soul? Did you warm her flesh? Could you appreciate at least her femininity?"

193 "To quiver from passion in the embraces of a young slave, rather than to quiver from fear in the embraces of an old Khan."

194 "So, why should they be slaves to our everyday sorrows about daily bread?"

взбалмошными, вольными в своих **прихотях**?"[195] (ibid.). Here, women are described as sweet, but also as whimsical, and even though they are free, they are "free in their caprices".[196] The text goes on: "И потому ни за что не приемлют чужой воли. И им никто не указ. Потому они и делают все по-своему, **признавая лишь свою собственную прихоть**"[197] (ibid.).

The paradox here is that Bakisat does not actually get what she wants. She cannot even decide for herself where she wants to live. This is also reflected in a conversation at a dinner party where she declares: "все мужчины скрытые феодалы"[198] (159). The term "feudal lord" here emphasises the connection between women's oppression and class oppression. Bakisat further describes her situation in the following way: "Только вы при этом не учили положения женщины? Куда она может поехать **без мужа**?" (161).[199] Both of these sentences highlight that she has to accept someone else's will and does not actually have free agency over her life.

Later on, as Jadiger lies dying and feels his body burning up (a physical symptom of freezing to death), he has forgotten whatever positive opinion he had about women. He hears a voice and, thinking about who that could be, comes to the conclusion "что его **истязателем** могла быть **только женщина**... Только они, женщины, способны на **жестокие**, **изощренные пытки**."[200] (360). Then he sees a girl with fox-like appearance

[195] "Did you know about the fact that women were originally conceived as kind, **whimsical** and free in their **caprices**?"
[196] Вольный can be translated as 'free', but also as 'unrestricted' and 'impudent'.
[197] "And therefore never accept someone else's will. And they bow to no one's authority. Therefore they do everything their own way, **acknowledging only their own caprice**."
[198] "All men are covert feudal lords."
[199] "Only, in doing so, have you not studied the situation of women? Where can she go to withou **her husband**?"
[200] "that his **torturer** could **only** be **a woman**... Only they, women, capable of **cruel, refined torment**."

which turns into an old woman: "И тут рыжая девчушка, к ужасу Жадигера, в миг превратилась в старуху [...]. Она [...] крепко обхватив его [...] злобно подталкивала к огню"[201] (361). He describes the old woman as "старая ведьма," and, as it turns out, is referring to his mother in law: "старая хрычовка[202] была ему, как всегда, омерзительна и отвратительна"[203] (ibid.). The fox-like girl is a girl from his childhood he used to play with. He associates Bakisat with that girl because both of them could easily outrun him. As he cannot catch up to Bakisat in a running competition it seems to him that she turns into a fox (see 142f.). In the scene above, he does not distinguish between the different women anymore. Here, all women merge into one, emphasising that he sees 'woman' itself as monolithic identity. Similarly to Jadiger, Azim, too, is capable of self-criticism regarding his relationship to women: "Ведь не было случая в его жизни, чтобы он претерпел хоть капельку зла от женщины. Наоборот, сколько помнит себя, это он сам творил зло и причинял им одни страдания."[204] (323). In contrast to Jadiger, Azim, however, does not seem to reflect much on the nature of women.

The depiction of women does not only take place through the character-focalizers Azim and Jadiger, but also through the narrative content itself. Throughout the entire novel, there are many essentialising statements about women. Men, on the other hand, are not defined through essentialising statements. Instead they are depicted through their actions, behaviours and thoughts. Paradoxically, this does not work in their favour. While

201 "And there the red-haired girl, to Jadiger's horror, momentarily turned into an old woman [...]. She [...] embraced him firmly [...] maliciously pushed him towards the fire."

202 This word is used throughout the novel by the Jadiger focalizer to describe Bakisat's mother.

203 "The old hag was, as usual, loathsome and disgusting to him."

204 "After all, there wasn't a moment in his life where he would have endured even a drop of malice from women. Quite the opposite, as long as he can remember, it was him who created malice and caused them only suffering."

they are depicted through their own agency and are given voice through the focalisation, the novel presents them in a rather unflattering light. While the character-description of women is often negative and denigrating, connecting them to the evils of the world, the narrative itself performs an analysis of negative, or even toxic, masculinity that often appears repellent. In fact, the entire novel could be read as a crisis of masculinity.[205] There is only one man who represents positive masculinity, the fisherman Red-head Ivan, who both through the colour of his hair as well as through his name sticks out from others and seems, ethnically, more Russian and/or European than Kazakh.[206] While Ivan can also be violent and menacing when he wants to settle a dispute, he is normally a calm person. He is depicted as a very loving, hard-working, father who takes care of his daughter as soon as he returns from work. He and his daughter have a very loving bond which stands in stark contrast to Jadiger, who even when he expresses joy over his daughter's success expresses it in a way that makes her feel uncomfortable. Jadiger seems to know little about his daughter's life, including that she no longer goes to school in the afternoon. His daughter, in turn, is neither happy to see him nor wants to spend time with him. Thus, Red-head Ivan's general behaviour as well as his bond with his daughter clearly marks his

[205] It would be interesting to situate this in the context of the general crisis of masculinity in the Soviet Union that Marko Dumancic describes in *Men Out Of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties*. Analysing Soviet movies from the 1960's, he argues that they depict "superfluous masculinity," a trope that is reminiscent of the 19th Century "superfluous person" (лишный человек). According to him, the death of Stalin and De-Stalinisation dissolved the image of Stalin as symbol of masculinity. Furthermore was the increasing importance of women as consumers in the Soviet economy experienced as a threat to men themselves. These and other factors led to a crisis of masculinity. See Marko Dumancic, *Men Out Of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties,* interviewed by Jill Massino, New Books in Russian and Eurasian Studies, New Books Network, May 4, 2021, https://newbooksnetwork.com/men-out-of-focus.

[206] Ivan is a typical Russian name, while red hair is a northern European trait and very unusual for ethnic Kazakhs, which is also remarked upon in the novel. He is, nonetheless, clearly described as Kazakh. This might also point towards the multi-ethnic composition of the Kazakhstani population. After the famine, ethnic Kazakhs were an ethnic minority in their own republic.

difference from both Azim and Jadiger.

Women, on the other hand, are rarely depicted on through their own voices, except for Jadiger's mother through her conversations with Jadiger, and Bakisat, who is given her own independent narrative voice. Nonetheless, women's points of view are often represented through specific words that are woven into the narrative. As I have pointed out in my analyses above, even the secon-person Azim and Jadiger focalisations represent not only their point of view, but also how their e.g. gaze is perceived by the women they encounter. What stands out is women's comparison to animals, as well as the lexical connection that emphasises their (the women's and the animals') analogous situatedness. Additionally, there are several instances in the text that hint at a direct connection between Bakisat and the Aral Sea. The most direct one is enounced by Sary Shaia, Jadiger's uncle. During a discussion between the two men, Sary Shaia exclaims:

> Разве не говаривали наши предки: '**Воды опасайся, а бабе - не верь**'?! Баба - заклятый враг. Не спорю - она тебя ласкает в постели, греет, а отвернешься - тебе же пакость творит. Погибель батыра испокон веков от бабы. Вот и твоя... Ойбай![207] (225).

Next to the unmistakable misogyny, what Sary Shaia is trying to communicate to Jadiger is that his wife is planning to leave him for Azim. He is therefore not talking about all women, but about one woman in particular. Nonetheless, the connection between the dangers of the water and the danger of women that is made is presented in a generalised formula.[208] A similar thought might be expressed symbolically in the novel: It is because

[207] "Didn't our ancestors used to say: **'Be aware of water, a woman - don't believe.'**?! Woman is the sworn enemy. I'm not arguing - she caresses you in bed, warms [you] up, but when you turn away - she creates mean tricks for you. The death of the hero from time immemorial came from women. And now, yours... Oibai!"

[208] This is reminiscent of the 'grey-bearded men's" saying "К концу света в недрах земных иссякнет

his wife leaves him that Jadiger goes out onto the ice in the first place, and it is the perilous ice through which he breaks with one leg that is the main reason why he freezes to death.

The analogy between Bakisat and the Aral is also mirrored in the similarity of the scenes depicting Jadiger's crossing of the frozen Sea and his attack on Bakisat. As I have described in Chapter One, Jadiger's decision-making process presents him as disconnected from himself, as not being aware of why he is acting the way he is. An unidentified person describes his behaviour with the words: "Да он пьян! Вдрызг пьян!"[209] (60). Here the narrative makes a clear connection to his assault on Bakisat, which occurs under the influence of alcohol. Another parallel is the importance of keys. To cross the ice, Jadiger needs the car keys, which he demands be given to him (see 58), and in order to stop Bakisat from leaving the bedroom, Jadiger locks the door and puts the key into his pocket (see 200).[210] In both scenes, an argument ensues. While several of the other fishermen try to dissuade him, Bakisat begs him to open the door. Just like the fishermen stood in front of the car yelling "Не пущу!"[211] (59), so does Jadiger block Bakisat with the same words: "Не пущу!" (201). Then, he begins threatening her: "С академиком миловаться горазда. А с мужем нет желания. Не так ли? [Бакизат:] - Прошу тебя, выпусти! [Ж] - Не пущу... И все!.. Теперь и **меня попробуй**. Есть ли разница между рыбаком и академиком."[212] (201) In his rage he openly threatens

вода, девушки на юношах повиснут без стыда" (128), I have quoted and analysed above (see 56).

209 "He's drunk! Utterly drunk!"

210 Bakisat had collected her blanket and cushion in order to sleep in their daughter's room, "предчувствуя, что этот вечер не предвещает ничего хорошего" (200, "sensing that nothing good will come of this evening").

211 "Not letting [you] through!"

212 "With the academic, there's much to caress. But with the husband, there's no wish for that. Isn't it like this? [Bakisat:] - Please, let me go! [J:] - I won't... And that's that!.. Now, **try me** as well. Is there a

Bakisat with rape, while in the other scene, he seems willing to kill. As he sees the leader of the other kolkhoz in front of his truck, he curses "Хочешь подохнуть, так раздавлю как со-ба-ку!"[213] (59). Another parallel is the words describing the moment when he loses control: "Будто внезапно взвился **вихрь**"[214] (201), the narrative voice describes in the scene with Bakisat. In the other scene, the way in which some inner force breaks out in him is also described as "как **вихрь**"[215] (59). In both situations, there are details that Jadiger cannot remember, which is expressed through "А **что было потом**... Все, **что было потом**, ты хоть убей, не мог **вспомнить**."[216] (Bakisat, 201) and "А **потом**... сколько бы ты ни силился **вспомнить**, что было ***потом***... представить не мог."[217] (on the ice, 63). Both scenes end with Jadiger returning to his senses. In the scene with the fishermen, he is greeted with joy: "**Эй!** Да он живой!"[218] (65), while in the other one, Bakisat's mother is confronting him: "**Эй**, кровопийца!"[219] (203).

Bakisat's mother further berates him with the words "злодей" (villain) and "Нар Кара"[220] (ibid.). Нар Кара (Nar Kara) is referring to a particularly big black camel. Earlier in the scene, Jadiger is already characterised as that very same camel: "Небось вспомнила, что ее мать называла тебя **Нар Кара**. Черный дромадер."[221] (200), and:

difference between a fisherman and an academic."

213 "If you want to die, I'll crush you like a dog!"

214 "As though a **whirlwind** rose suddenly."

215 "Like a **whirlwind**."

216 "And **what happened then**... Everything, **that happened then**, you could, for the life of you, not **remember**."

217 "And **then**... however much you tried to **remember**, what happend ***then***... you couldn't imagine."

218 "**Hey**, he's alive!"

219 "**Hey**, bloodsucker!"

220 Нар, in Kazakh, means dromedary, see "Нар" Glosbe, accessed May 30, 2021, https://de.glosbe.com/kk/de/нар. The word also exists in Russian and is translated on wiktionary as "hybrid camel" into English; қара means black.

221 "She probably remembered that her mother used to call you **Nar Kara**. Black dromedary."

"помимо ее воли, перед глазами возникал, **мерещился Нар Кара**, который громадной темной глыбой надвигается на нее."[222] (201). Here, the black dromedary might even parallel the grey-blue bull, Kok Oguz (Кок-Огуз)[223] from Jadiger's dream (see 54). They are both of exceptional height and present a looming, dangerous figure. In his dream, Jadiger feels that he is "весь налитый непонятной, **свинцовой тяжестью**"[224] (54). When he falls to the floor during his drunken attack on Bakisat he is "не в силах оторвать от пола налитую **свинцовой тяжестью**, раскалывающуюся на части голову"[225] (202). This connection is also reflected through the word "скотина"[226] that Bakisat yells at him (201) and that Jadiger used to describe the Kok Oguz (54).

Another way in which Aral and Bakisat mirror each other is through their respective relationships with the two male protagonists. While Jadiger loves both of them, he is incapable of understanding them and thus cannot ‘save’ either of them. He cannot stop the desiccation just has he is unable to provide a loving and caring relationship for Bakisat. This is also expressed through his own perception of success. In relation to the Aral Sea and his community of fishermen, success is defined through a rich catch and thereby intrinsically linked the Soviet production quotas. Similarly, he defines his success with Bakisat through the fact that she wants to marry him. It is, indeed, she who asks him to marry her after Azim has left her.[227] While he describes his

[222] "Against her will before her eyes appeared, **she fancied she saw, Nar Kara** who is approaching her like a huge, dark lump."

[223] In Kazakh, "көк" means blue and "өгүз" means ox. As the novel explains, the bull is a legendary animal that drinks up the entire Aral Sea. He is also described as "Сизый Вол" (54), i.e. grey-blue ox.

[224] "Completely filled with an incomprehensible, **leaden heaviness.**"

[225] "Not able to pull away from the floor the filled **leaden heaviness** that was tearing apart his head."

[226] "Brute," but also means "cattle."

[227] It only becomes clear in the last part of the novel that she thought that if she had children she might forget Azim and be happy (see 260). Additionally, she might have felt the social pressure to marry.

feelings of joy and happiness, he does also realise that Bakisat is deeply unhappy (see 7; 49f.). However, his own happiness, and therefore his amorous success, is not measured in terms of Bakisat's happiness or even their happiness as a couple, but depends on the formal status of marriage.

Azim, on the other hand, readily trades Bakisat for a marriage that might provide upward-mobility.[228] In a similar vein, he is ready to exchange the Aral Sea for the possibility of a city as grand as St. Petersburg and the prospect of more harvests through cultivation of the freed up land. It is, however, not only the mirage of a white city in the steppe or the imagination of his own luxurious life that leads him to trade both Bakisat and the Aral Sea. Next to his academic success and his grand plans, he also has political aspirations that he cherishes more than the sea. It is only when these missions have failed that he returns to Bakisat. Furthermore, Azim feels no guilt for having sacrificed the Aral Sea and Bakisat: He does not recognise that he is partly to blame for the Aral Sea crisis and instead sees himself as the scapegoat. Neither does he feel guilty about his behaviour towards Bakisat. When he meets Jadiger on the ice sheet, he explains: "**Вины** за собой **не чувствую**. И потому прощения не прошу. Я тебе ничего не должен. Хочешь знать, я **вернул** себе лишь то, что по глупости когда-то уступил тебе."[229] (232). To him, Bakisat is almost some sort of product that can be exchanged and recovered at will. His treatment of the Aral Sea follows the same logic. He thinks that he can simply

[228] It is never directly mentioned why exactly he left Bakisat, but it happens after he had gone to an office where he was supposed to get his uncle's tickets for the holidays and realises that even his uncle's titles impress the bureaucrat very little. He does, however, see a young woman who also gets holiday tickets there. Whether this is in fact the woman he then married is unclear, what this scene shows is how Azim begins to subordinate his love for Bakisat (whom he was about to marry) for a prospect of a career that would earn him social prestige and therefore also access to luxury.

[229] "I **don't feel guilty**. And therefore don't ask for forgiveness. I owe you nothing. If you'd like to know, I merely **retrieved** what I once left to you out of stupidity."

exchange the Aral Sea for cotton plantations, just as he exchanged Bakisat for his career. Furthermore, to him, water itself is a simple good that can easily be exchanged as well as recovered. In his mind, whatever amount of water is lost through the desiccation of the Aral, can be recovered through his "discovery" of underground water. Thus, both Bakisat and the Sea are mere products in the exchange of goods.

Through her relationship with both men, Bakisat is clearly juxtaposed to the Aral Sea, and therefore, the oppression of women is depicted as parallel to the oppression of nature. Yet, this analysis is complicated at the end of the novel. After Jadiger injures his leg, it is Bakisat who faces the lone male wolf, who, just when he is preparing to jump at her, is taken away by the piece of ice he's standing on. The Aral Sea – it seems – has saved Bakisat from the wolf. The wolf, on the other hand, is lexically linked to Azim: "Азим едва не **взвыл по-волчьи**"[230] (323). The word "взвыл" (he howled) is mirrored in the description of the he-wolf narrative. When he realises that Jadiger is wearing the skin of his partner, the she-wolf who was killed by a shepherd, he howls, expressing his grief (see 344). The Russian word used here is "**завыл**" (he began to howl). After Azim had managed to get off the ice and realises that the others won't make it, he wants to hide so they do not see him: "Потом, так и не смея поднять головы, пригибаясь **по-волчьи**, бросился бежать меж кустами."[231] (326). While Azim manages to get off the ice, Bakisat doesn't. Now, the sea itself separates Bakisat from Azim, similarly to how she is separated from the wolf. Woman and Sea are no longer paralleled in their

[230] "Azim almost **howled like a wolf**." This scene takes place when Azim is still on the ice sheet, huddled together with Bakisat under a fur coat.

[231] "Then, not daring to lift his head, bending down **like a wolf**, [you] dashed off running between the bushes."

oppression. Rather, the Aral itself becomes an agent who influences human life, thereby directly contradicting Azim's proposition that humans are the masters of nature. While Bakisat forgave Azim, she is now literally as well as symbolically, saved by the sea from devoting her life to him:[232] "то ли по воле **небес** или **моря**"[233] (359), comments the narrative voice when the ice sheet separates the wolf from Bakisat.

As Jadiger freezes to death, the novel ends with Bakisat, the only human survivor (both physically and morally), standing alone on the ice sheet on the Aral Sea. Metaphorically, she is the Sea. But is she the eternal feminine principle, equated with nature, by right of birth closer to nature? Symbolically, she is equated with perseverance and survival which might be similar to the idea of the eternal feminine, but not due to a natural 'feminine' quality that would situate her closer to nature. Rather, what saves her is mere luck. In his fall, Jadiger's leg breaks through the ice sheet which is why he freezes to death. When Bakisat falls, trying to catch up to Azim, she is unhurt. Then, it is the ice sheet itself that almost miraculously saves her from being attacked by the wolf. When the helicopter finally arrives and drops down warm soup and blankets, she still has the strength to use this help, while Jadiger has already passed away. That out of the three protagonists it is the woman, Bakisat, who survives, instead of either of the two men[234] might seem counterintuitive, as the pilot thinks to himself after he has dropped down the

[232] In light of how he treats other women, and due to the fact that he even conceals his expulsion from the party and his job loss, it seems very improbable that she would have been happy with him in the long run. The Aral Sea forces Azim to show his real face, while Bakisat has so far only seen an idealised mirage she is running after.

[233] "Whether by the will of **heaven** or the **sea**."

[234] Azim would not have survived on the ice. In his focalisation he begins to hallucinate that his opponents are with him on the ice sheet, he imagines hearing someone's teeth clatter. The narrator points out that it all happens in his head, he is hearing the chattering of his own teeth: "И т о т, его неотступный мучитель находился у него в голове." (309).

supplies: "Из троих, унесенных бурей на льдине, несомненно выжила, стало быть, **женщина, слабое, нежное существо**."[235] (365).

This essentialising definition of 'woman' is contradicted by the narrative that tells how Bakisat fought against the wolf, using the matches, just like Jadiger had told her to She moves forward, advancing on the wolf who moves away from the flames towards the edge of the ice sheet. Just as her last match is used up, the ice sheet breaks off. Thus, the Aral Sea has not saved her alone, it was also her determination and bravery to move against the wolf, or else the wolf might not have been on the part of the ice sheet that was ready to break off. In this life-threatening situation Bakisat does not rely on anyone else to save her, partly because there simply is no one. Jadiger, although still alive, is unable to even move. Even the wolf, who had been scared to attack Jadiger because of his bad experiences with human males, perceives Bakisat as the lesser threat: "Было видно, что женщина в страхе, не владеет собой. Волк знал, что **самки двуногих слабы и беспомощны, не то что волчицы.**"[236] (345). Thus, what the wolf notes is, in fact, the socialisation of females who are not weak by nature, as is depicted through his vivid description of the she-wolf as she devours her pray: "Серая волчица, **набрасывалась** всегда первой, любила сунуть морду прямо в брызжущий поток горячея крови, отфыркиваясь ею, а потом слизывать языком кровь с носа."[237] (ibid.). This powerful image of energy and life-force is, however, not the only image of strong females in the

[235] "Out of the three who had been taken away on the ice by the storm without a doubt survived, as it turned out, **the woman, a weak, gentle being**."

[236] "It was obvious that the woman was scared, wasn't able to control herself. The wolf knew that **the females of the two-legged are weak and helpless, unlike the she-wolves**."

[237] "The grey she-wolf, always **attacking** first, loved to stick her snout directly into the pouring stream of hot blood, snorting with it, and then licking the blood off her nose with her tongue."

novel. Just like the legendary Kazakh women who ride into battle to defend their people, Bakisat moves against the wolf to defend herself and the helpless Jadiger. When Bakisat tries to open the supply package her similarity to the she-wolf is marked also textually. As she realises that she is unable to open the package with her stiff cold fingers, she knees down and "**вцепилась** веревку зубами"[238] (366). The image closely resembles that of a predator attacking (набрасываться) its pray. Through these visual and textual connections, the social definition of women as "weak and soft beings" is rejected.

Just like the socialisation of human women into weak creatures is stressed, so is the general human alienation from nature. While the she-wolf can be feminine and "**кокетливо** расхажива[ться] перед своим молодым супругом"[239] (346), she is also a deadly hunter who unceremoniously tears her pray apart. However, through the narrative, femininity itself is also essentialised, which is expressed through the "coquetry" of the she-wolf. The he-wolf focalizer constantly stresses that the she-wolf always remembers that she is female: "Волчица всегда помнила, что она **самка**"[240] (345), and "Серая волчица любила возиться с волчатами, но при этом не забывала, что она **самка**"[241] (346). Both these sentences are followed by a description of how she tries to attract her partner's attention. Thus, while there is a certain criticism of gendered socialisation, there is a simultaneous naturalisation of clearly gendered behaviour that defines the she-wolf according to stereotypical female human behaviour (coquettish). This, in turn, naturalises the coquettish behaviour of women as an essential trait. Indeed, when in heat, the she-

238 "**Seizing** the rope with her teeth."
239 "**Coquettishly** strut about in front of her young husband."
240 "The she-wolf always remembered that she is a **female**."
241 "The grey she-wolf loved to spend time with her wolf cubs, but while doing so didn't forget that she is a **female**."

wolf's fur becomes more beautiful, which is compared to women's clothing: "ее тугой круп как бы обтягивался шелковистой лоснящейся **юбочкой**"[242] (ibid.) and thus reflecting Azim's assumption that, based on the way she dresses, the girl he sees is trying to impress a man.

As this discussion shows, nature and women are clearly paralleled. Nonetheless, the novel can neither be situated as clearly ecofeminist nor simply ecofeminine. While ecofeminist criticism argues that the oppression of nature and the oppression of women are analogous to each other, ecofeminine criticism essentialises women and equates them with nature.[243] In some instances, the novel clearly parallels their oppression (e.g. through the quadrangle Bakisat-Aral-Jadiger-Azim), in others, it presents an essentialising, monolithic depiction of women (females as inherently coquettish). Nature itself is also often feminised: "угодно было **матери-природе** сотворить посреди пустынных степей синее-синее море [...]. Две могучее **реки**, как два **материнских сосца**, испокон веков щедро питали его"[244] (85). Similarly to the general narrative style and content, the symbolic, philosophically critical plane of the novel does also not follow any one strict logic. There is not one particular Kazakh ecocriticism that is presented and thus an analysis cannot be reduced to a simple definition such as ecofeminist or ecofeminine. Instead, the novel presents different shades of arguments and opinions that are often contradictory.

[242] "Her tight croup seemed to be covered by a silky, shining **little skirt**."

[243] See Victoria Davion, “Is Ecofeminism Feminist?,” in *Ecological Feminism,* ed. Karen Warren, and Barbara Wells-Howe (New York: Routledge, 1994), 9.

[244] "It was wanted by **mother-nature** to create in the middle of the deserted steppes a deep, deep-blue sea [...]. Two mighty **rivers** like two **motherly nipples** have from time immemorial been generously feeding it."

V. CONCLUSION

As can be seen, Nurpeisov's *Final Respects* presents a complex and multivocal analysis of the Aral Sea crisis, paying attention to different forms of oppression. His analysis of the environmental crisis is furthermore deeply connected to the crisis of masculinity on the one hand, and the crisis of the centralised Soviet government that is unable to adequately deal with the environment of its periphery. While women themselves are given voice primarily through the Bakisat focalisation, they are also presented through their conversations with men, as well as their reaction to objectification by men. While these scenes are narrated from the male perspective, the male gaze itself is challenged. Even though the men themselves are the ones who mainly speak in this novel, the narrative style itself, i.e. the oscillation between first-, second-, and third-person narrator, simultaneously alienates the reader from the characters. The men themselves are, furthermore, often depicted in terms of negative, or even toxic masculinity.

Nurpeisov's environmental criticism in the novel is complex and presents different local strategies that engage with and react to the catastrophe. The ending is furthermore symbolic in its confrontation between nature and humans, the protagonists and the Aral Sea. Nature is presented as independent from human influence and in possession of its own agency. Thus, while humans might imagine themselves to be controlling nature through technological progress, this is just a modernisation mirage. In reality, we humans depend on our natural environment. Far from directing our own history, humans oftentimes simply react to environmental conditions. Even our current pandemic is a daily reminder of this simple fact. In the novel, this co-dependence is depicted through

people leaving their aul in search for a better place to live in. Just like the environment reacts to human action, humans themselves react to the changes in the natural conditions of the places they inhabit. This is also emphasised through the recurring motif of duty/obligation [долг], which is so important to Nurpeisov himself, as well as for his characters.

If the Aral Sea symbolises all of nature then Jadiger, Bakisat and Azim can be read as character-types that show how different types of people will react to environmental catastrophes. There will always be those who will only think about saving their own skin. But there will also be those who choose practices of mutual aid. In the end, Jadiger did not die because he stayed behind to notify the others that the ice sheet had floated back to the shore, but because he fell and broke through the ice. At the very end of the novel, Bakisat is not actually alone. She is surrounded by the sea, a pilot is flying to her help and a little bird who had crept under Jadiger's coat to stay warm is flying away towards the shore. Even though the ending cannot be described as a happy-end, it is not devoid of hope.

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