

Author manuscript.

Article citation: Tommaso Trevisani, 'Restructuring Marriage and Family in Industrial Kazakhstan: Axes of Inequality and Conjuality in a Former Soviet Steel Plant', *Oriente Moderno* 100 (2020) 200-224.

## **Restructuring marriage and family in industrial Kazakhstan: Axes of inequality and conjuality in a former Soviet steel plant**

Tommaso Trevisani

University of Naples "L'Orientale"

ttrevisani@unior.it

### **Abstract**

*This paper addresses how changing patterns of conjuality, family and labour play out in a gender-mixed, multi-ethnic industrial setting built in Soviet times and nowadays owned by foreign corporate capital. Matrimonial relationships among Kazakhstani steel workers have come under sustained pressure as a consequence of privatization and labour restructuring. As a result, workers must accommodate their family lives and partnership prospects to their own precarious situation in an increasingly adverse world of industrial labour. Kazakh, Russian, male, female, precarious and regular workers are differently affected and adopt different strategies. Mirroring workplace related inequalities, marriage and family patterns rooted in distinctive traditions in multi-ethnic Kazakhstan are currently being reshaped. At the same time, marriage and family have become more important in determining workers' wellbeing at work and beyond.*

### **Keywords**

Kazakhstan, family, marriage, steel industry, social inequality, labour

In "Temirtau, Portrait of a City", an official publication authored by the mayor (Kaz. *akim*) of Kazakhstan's major mono-industrial steel town, a section dedicated to the former Soviet cinema theatre "Vostok", now turned into the city's marriage hall, displays a photo of the building depicting a small group surrounding a young Russian-looking couple that just got married. Gathering on the stairs of the renewed neo-classical Stalin-era architecture, the picture captures a moment before the crowd will be entering an oversized wedding car waiting at the entrance (one imagines, to continue the celebration in a restaurant or for the customary photo tour with the newlywed couple). The caption says:

The Palace of Weddings is a special place for lovers who have decided to perpetuate the union of unison heart beatings with wedding rings by attaining the main family document - a certificate of marriage. Through the efforts of city authorities, the Vostok building, the city's first cinema, dear to the heart of many citizens, was renovated and found a new life. Nowadays the Mendelssohn waltz sounds in its elegant hall where the newly-wed swear loyalty to each other. And the first steps of young families are

supported by the State Program "Affordable Housing", according to which several modern residential complexes will be built in the city.<sup>1</sup> (Sultanov 2012, p. 117)

Although the pictured wedding could well be of a steel workers' family, the happy image conveyed in this official city album contrasts with marriage narratives recorded over my fieldwork in the steel plant.<sup>2</sup> In their accounts on marriage, their own or that of kin or friends, the helping hand by the state for the newly-wed never got mentioned, while getting married in the way suggested by the abovementioned vignette was rare exception. Accounts of single-mothers, divorced, couples living outside the wedlock were preponderant and stories of difficult marriages, remarriage or non-marriage figured prominently.

Marriage and family in Central Asia, long discussed by ethnographers in connection with its alleged traditionalism and resilience, have recently attracted the interest of scholars acknowledging the deep impact of post-Soviet change on these institutions. By addressing marriage among a multi-ethnic workforce at the Temirtau Steel plant this paper explores how different understandings of conjugality, family and labour play out in a gender-mixed, multi-ethnic industrial setting. Thereby, it reassesses the centrality of labour for marriage and family and contributes to a growing literature on family, marriage and labour in traditional and post-traditional Central Asia.<sup>3</sup>

This project is part of a broader work on class and labour at the Karaganda Metallurgical Steel works, once named KARMET, today in the private ownership of ArcelorMittal (Trevisani 2015, 2016a, 2018, 2019). Once symbol of Soviet modernity, the steel plant declined in the post-Soviet years. A foreign takeover in 1995 by the British-Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal initiated a gradual process of restructuring centered on the reduction of the workforce and the erosion of labour rights. Growing labour flexibilization and fragmentation (Harvey 1987; Hann and Parry 2018) deeply impacted on steel workers' lives and did not leave unaffected how steel workers get married and understand and live their marriages.

Scholarly debates on family and marriage in post-Soviet Central Asia often take the Muslim marriage and the traditional extended family as the implicit point of departure for deconstruction, or for analyzing its transformation or "modernization" (see Roche 2017; McBrien 2017; Trevisani 2016b). In this literature, forms of relatedness (Carsten 2000) that do not go back to the dominant type of Central Asian marriage- and family pattern have received little attention. Following the example of research on post-Soviet dispossession bridging the gap between post-Soviet industrial development and Central Asian cultural identities and religious legacies (Nazpary 2002), this article engages with family and marriage by taking both perspectives into consideration. Strong of its Soviet industrial legacy, but with a rapidly changing demography, economy, political framework and ethnic composition, Temirtau finds itself in a twilight. Neither a "purely" Central Asian perspective, nor a "Soviet/European" lens alone can adequately make sense of steel workers' marriage patterns and preferences, if taken separately.

---

<sup>1</sup> Transl. by author. Earlier versions of this article were discussed at workshops organized by Juliette Cleuziou and Julie McBrien at the University of Amsterdam (March 2017) and at Orientale University of Naples (June 2018). I thank the workshop organizers, Aksana Ismailbekova and the anonymous reviewers for precious feedback and comments.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork has been conducted in the Karaganda region in 2013-4 and in follow-up years in the framework of the research group Industry and Inequality in Eurasia at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. For a full description of fieldwork conditions see: Trevisani 2016a. Fieldwork benefited immensely from the research assistance of Xeniya Prilutskaya.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance: Reeves (2014); McGuire (2017); Behzadi (2019); Cleuziou (2017) and (2019); Keskkula (2018b)

By addressing steel workers' marriages I pay particular attention to their industrial workplace rather than to their lives outside the factory because this is where most workers have spent most of their adult lives and where they have forged, lived through, and -very often- broken up and remade their conjugal relationships re-centering them around the workplace. Furthermore, a view from the shop floor enables me to point at the interdependencies that link work experience, social relatedness and industrial production. These interdependencies inform post-Soviet industrial workers' ideology of marriage and family more markedly than tradition or more recent consumerism trends.

A view from the factory shows that labour fragmentation, triggered by foreign ownership as a mean to enhance company profitability and to turn the Soviet social factory into a "modern" neoliberal factory, has strengthened family fragmentation. While this resonates with broader findings on affect and capitalism (such as in Yanagisako 2002; Mollona 2009), it is a process that thus far received little attention in Central Asia. By contrast, I observe how families, reshaped by divorce, separation, remarriage or companionship, are rearranged around workplace contingencies, thereby altering how industrial communities envision their marriages and get married. Reconfirming the centrality of social relatedness in labour, I also observe how different marriage and family models are differently equipped to navigate the growing demands of restructured labour.

A perspective from the Temirtau steel plant enables to see how recent marriage and family patterns in industrial Kazakhstan follow three newly emerging axes of inequality:

First, the *class* divide between contract and company workers (Parry 2013; Hann and Parry 2018) between a struggling old working class (company labour) and a precarized new working class (contract labour) (Trevisani 2018) also relates to their different marriage aspirations and possibilities. Company workers have the better jobs and usually a background in Temirtau's Soviet era industrial families. Contract workers are younger on average, poorly paid, less skilled, and less protected newcomers from different backgrounds. Their work is transitory and marked by high turnover rates. Many were recently migrated *Oralmans*<sup>4</sup> or rural Kazakhs, ending up in this industrial town for want of any work because of pressing economic problems. In Temirtau, working as a contract worker is a synonym for precarious, less dignified employment, as compared to the regular company workers. The old and the new working class face distinctive work- and family related problems and specific ways of coping. Although they differ in status, wages, skills, age, gender, ethnicity, company and contract both suffer under worsening conditions. Hence, company and contract workers' difficulties with reconciling work with marriage are dissimilar in that they occupy different positions within the industrial labour hierarchy, but, overall, they are similar in so far that their class trajectories converge downwardly.

Second, the *gender* divide is strengthened by the devaluation of women's labour and by the unmaking of Soviet marriage- and family models (Kandiyoti 2007). The Soviet factory was a repository of the ideal of the working married mother (Adler 2004). In the post-Soviet factory, in a situation of job cuts, this ideal is difficult to attain. Hopes and values of marital "modernity" (Giddens 1992; Parry 2020, p. 512-575) are being displaced in everyday work-related struggles. My data show that staff reduction of the once more gender balanced workforce has been particularly strong among the conveyor belt operators, traditionally a female profession in the Temirtau steel plant. In the past, more than the half of the workforce of the shop floor in which I did my fieldwork used to

---

<sup>4</sup> *Oralmans* are Kazakhs from Mongolia, Uzbekistan, China and other countries who have immigrated in Kazakhstan after 1991, following a government program supporting their "repatriation", especially in areas where ethnic Kazakhs were a minority.

be women, nowadays only a third. Whereas there used to be an operator for every single conveyor belt, today one operator must look after many conveyor belts in constant need of ‘cleaning’ (meaning that fallen ores must be shovelled back on the conveyor, as otherwise machines will stop at some point). This burdensome task is now being increasingly outsourced to contract workers, most of them women and Kazakh.

Third, an *ethno-national* divide in marital notions, traditions and practices, reflects the complexity of the relationship between geographically and historically shaped, and ethnically connoted communities. In Temirtau, the Soviet industrial legacy left a strong Russian inprint on demography, language and culture (Dave 2007, p. 58), also shaping how marriage and family is lived and conceived by the non-Russian (but Russianized) workers.<sup>5</sup> Change is now happening against the background of Kazakhization (Nazpary 2002; Cummings 2005; Dave 2007), rebalancing politics, economy and demography in favour of the titular nationality. The plant traditionally employed more Russians, Europeans and ethnically mixed and Russianized nationalities, who arrived over the Stalin- and Khrushchev years to build up an industrial site in the barren steppe and later to work in the giant steel plant.<sup>6</sup> More recently arrived Kazakh families hold on to more conservative and elaborated Muslim marriage forms, but in Temirtau their model is attenuated by the fact of being a minority surrounded by industrial work culture. In parallel, Kazakhization has refashioned discussions about the distinctiveness of the Central Asian Muslim family, with more children, lower divorce rates, stronger parental role and more conservative gender relations, more exuberant and expensive wedding celebrations, as opposed to the Slavic ones. On the other hand, as rural *Oralmans* turn into industrial workers, their cultural models of marriage and family also have started to change.

These new inequalities in labour, gender and among ethnonationally connoted communities, all play out in workers’ marriages and partnerships. However, we shall see how marriage and partnership themselves have increasingly become actively differentiating institutions that, after privatization and restructuring, have become more consequential in shaping workers’ social condition and status.

### **The Soviet industrial family model in crisis**

Marriage and family patterns in the last decade of the Soviet Union were contradictory, problem-ridden and increasingly diversified. In Soviet Central Asia traditional attitudes to marriage and divorce were on average more marked than in the rest of the Soviet Union, but large cities and newly developed industrial regions, such as Temirtau, were different in that they followed the pattern of the Russian urban-industrial areas, with higher divorce rates and smaller household sizes (Geiger 1968; Zickel 1991, p. 230-3). According to Shlapentokh (1991) late Soviet urban family trends were simultaneously characterised by more “family erosion” (p. 271) due to growing individualism,

---

<sup>5</sup> That is, not only Russians but Slavs, Germans, Koreans, Tatars, Greeks, Baltic and other ethnically mixed and Russianized people that adopted Russian language and a Soviet work culture back in the Soviet years. In fieldwork interactions these peoples appeared to be subsumed into one broad category and colloquially referred to as “Russians”, as opposed to the Kazakh speakers.

<sup>6</sup> Soviet era statistics about citizens’ and workforce ethnicity are not publicly available, but Saktaganova and Abdrakhmanova (2010, p. 67) give the urban population in Central Kazakhstan oblast’ in 1959 at Kazakhs 12,7%, Russians 52,3%, Germans 10,5%, Ukrainians 10,3%, Tatars 2,8%, Koreans 1,4% and others. According to the Karaganda Encyclopaedia (1986) Russians were 70,7% of Temirtau’s population in 1979, by comparison 60,9% in 2009 (Karaganda Oblast Census, 2011), with overall population declined by a third.

independence, marriage delay or refusal, but also by greater “family cohesion” (p. 277) fuelled by conservative values and family roles, resulting in a situation in which both marriage eschewers and those embracing family conservatism were on the rise.

In Temirtau the Soviet state actively promoted a conservative family model among industrial workers, with one-two children and both parents working, through a policy of incentives and entitlements linked to the workplace. Men and women were nominally enjoying equal opportunities, but more often than not the man was the main breadwinner and the woman worked in less remunerated jobs that were compatible with the role of homemaker and childcare giver. The latter kind of jobs were available in plenty over the last years of the Soviet Union in mono-industrial Temirtau, where life and work reverted around the steel plant. Husband and wife, mothers, daughters, grandchildren, would typically end up spending their working lives on the same or on a nearby shop floor. Workers followed gendered careers, with female workers caring for the conveyor belts or sitting behind machine consoles or office desks, their brothers, uncles, male neighbours taking up work as mechanical fitters, electricians, excavator drivers etc. Workers’ children would marry partners met at school or on training programmes on the factory premises. Later on, they would move into housing blocks built by the shop floor for its workers and send their children to one of the steel plants’ kindergarten places.

Typically, workers would marry young, and due to housing shortage, young families would wait long until being able to move out of the parental household. According to workers recalling their youth in the last decade of the Soviet Union I talked with, divorces and remarriages were relatively frequent in a plant at that time crowded with young staff of the two sexes, but not to the point of putting the nuclear family model into question. Even after divorce or breakup, a protective family environment would encase the youth at home and at work. Jobs and training were often mediated by parents or relatives that worked in one of the factory’s shop floors. The plant actively supported and celebrated labour dynasties (Kesküla 2018a; Trevisani 2019), through which jobs, knowledge and status were transmitted. Families transmitted conservative and patriotic values and pride for one’s workplace. In workers’ nostalgic accounts Soviet years are routinely idealized as a period of marital happiness, carelessness, solidarity and optimism. In these romanticized narratives<sup>7</sup> of the Soviet factory families lived a symbiotic relationship with the workplace, which was at once provider of housing, welfare, childcare, sociality and education.

This protective and inward-looking social environment of the workplace began to fall apart with the end of the Soviet Union. The early 1990s, the years of “razval” (crisis, breakdown), took a heavy toll on the stability of families, which suffered from economic breakdown and from the end of the Soviet workplace and its all-round provided care. Temirtau became a hotbed of social problems, with a nation-wide reputation for industrial pollution, addiction and criminality. Temirtau entered a post-industrial “rustbelt” decay, associated with the transition years of wild capitalism and chaos (Nazpary 2002) and the massive outmigration of Slavic and European residents. “Our men could not stand this and began to drink”: this is how a recurring narrative of female factory workers, often interspersed with stories of domestic violence, begins with when remembering family crises in the 1990s. The factory, once the focus of social life, became a socially dangerous place, haunted by stories of sexual harassment, robbery, petty criminality and a generalized lack of trust. Families

---

<sup>7</sup> Workers’ generalizations about how work was stable and pay good contradicts findings of research on labour conditions in Soviet industries in Central Asia (see for instance Kalinovsky 2018; Payne 2001 for earlier decades). This notwithstanding, according to fieldwork interviews steel workers in late Soviet Temirtau were envied for their privileged jobs and had among the highest wages in the Kazakh SSR.

broke apart on the shop floor as a result of migration, economic depression and individual crises. Workers experienced a general devaluation of industrial jobs, a loss of status and symbolic capital.

With the privatization of the combine to Mittal in 1995 preconditions for stability and security for workers and their families were gradually re-established. Wage arrears were repaid and production recovered. By and large, over the early 1990s the steel plant's capacity of maintaining some continuity in production preserved Temirtau from worse destiny. The wave of deindustrialization that had swept in the 1990s over the industrial settlements of the Karaganda region around Temirtau had caused the shrinking of many industrial and mining communities in the region (see: Kesküla 2018a, 2018b). Compared to the empty housing blocks and industrial ruins spotting the surrounding steppe, Temirtau had fared relatively well.

The economic relief following privatization allowed workers to live up to a family ideal still rooted in the Soviet experience, but now remoulded by the new consumerist possibilities and desires taking shape in the wake of the economic growth of the 2000s (see Patino 2008). Worker-management relations began to deteriorate in the second post-Soviet decade, when local labour entered into a more conflictual phase with foreign management over pay and job cuts (Trevisani 2019). As a consequence of labour protests wages grew. Suddenly, at least for the better paid company workers, exotic travel destinations and flat TV screens became a possibility. But prices at the newly opening supermarkets and in real estate were growing faster than workers' salaries, ultimately cementing workers' relative loss of wage value and status. Despite their battles for better employment conditions, even the better paid company workers found themselves again struggling and indebted. The Soviet social factory, with its emphasis on production, high employment levels and welfare, did not vanish all of a sudden after privatization. But rising wages and early retirement deals accelerated shop floor restructuring, obligating the workers who had remained to take up the tasks of those who had left in addition to their usual work assignment. With growing pressure on remaining workers, augmenting pace in restructuring, job cuts, flexibility and growing inequality caused by the wage and employment differences between regular and contract workers, the Soviet family model was gradually being undermined from the shop floor and workers' marriages and families entered a new critical period.

### **The workers**

I discovered weddings, marriage and family as a relatively late topic in fieldwork, only surfacing long after having gained some of the workers' trust. During fieldwork in the steel plant I was confronted with a culture of suspicion and privacy, a diffidence to talk about even elementary facts of private life on the factory premises (Trevisani 2016a). Overcoming workers' diffidence took effort and persuasion, sometimes never fully succeeded. In talks about their marriages, workers were often uncomfortable about a perceived "disorderliness" of their private lives, and conversations could take a reluctant, defensive or embarrassed undertone, when talking about the own or others' non-linear family situations. In shop floor conversations many workers said to value the ideal of the stable nuclear family, centered on a male breadwinner and his home-making wife, composed of a non-divorced couple and their children, but this ideal was only attained in a minority of workers' households. In shop floor conversations on marriage and family recurring answers included:

"We have more divorces than marriages in the city"

"Among those working in the factory the majority lives in broken families"

Temirtau's reputation for social problems goes back to the years of the break-up of the Soviet Union, when the factory was at the verge of closure and the shrinking city's future highly uncertain. Although this legacy still hinges on today's city, recent statistics show gradual realignment with nation-wide patterns. Still, marriage figures were slightly lower (1-10%) and divorce figures between 30% and 50% higher than national average over the 2009-2016 period.<sup>8</sup> Data from a shop floor survey conducted in 2013-14 among workers of the steel plant's iron stockyards department DSF (Drobilno Sortirovochnaya Fabrika – Sorting and Crushing Plant) confirm workers' abovementioned statements, and shows that marriage and family patterns<sup>9</sup> varied greatly between company and contract workers, between Kazakh workers and those of other nationality, and between male and female workers.<sup>10</sup> Company workers, especially if male and Kazakh, were the group with the most stable marital relationships in the factory. Russian workers were more likely to be divorced (and remarried) than Kazakh workers. Women workers and contract workers were the two groups with the most unstable marriages and partner relationships.<sup>11</sup> Women workers were far more likely to be divorced and to live with children in single parent households than men.<sup>12</sup> Many of the non-Kazakh women were single mothers or divorced, whereas most Kazakh women working as contract workers were married to husbands unemployed or in odd jobs, complaining to have to work to sustain their families.

“Women who work in this place are all without a proper husband – or those whose husband doesn't want to work. No man would let a woman work in a place like this.”  
(Irina)

Women on the shop floor, irrespective of their status, all complained to be there only for necessity, either out of lack of a sustaining partner, or for the partner's incapacity to sustain them. The factory had turned from being the workplace of wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, into one of single mothers, divorcees, or wives with “bad” husbands (i.e. who abandon or exploit their female relation). The outcome of restructuring coincided with a *devaluation of female labour* in both company and contract work. Work continues to follow gendered paths, but female work has become less secure and less important than male work, while female work becoming heavier, more

<sup>8</sup> See: Kazstat (2017). Data must be read against the national background of high divorce rates (Kozhanova 2019)

<sup>9</sup> Less than half of DSF workers (48%) had married only once and were currently living with their spouse, whereas 44% had been either married more than once and were divorced or separated, or were living in a stable relationship with a partner whose marriage had been previously broken up. Of those couples living together without a marriage registration there was no case in which at least one of the two had not been previously living in a marriage and were now divorced. 8% of the respondents were single or had never married and were living alone or with parents or kin (this latter group almost exclusively included younger workers).

<sup>10</sup> While 64% of the Kazakhs were married (and never divorced or separated) only 44% were so among workers of all other nationalities. Among the Kazakh workers 27% of the respondents were divorced or separated, while this figure was 41% among all workers of the other nationalities put together. In the DSF 16.3% of the regular workforce and 56% of the contract workers were Kazakhs. For comparison, in 2013 25% of Temirtau's population was Kazakh. Half of the ethnic Kazakhs working in the DSF had an *Oralman* background.

<sup>11</sup> While 54% of the company workers were married and never divorced or separated, only 27% of the contract workers were so. 54% of the contract workers were either divorced or separated, the largest part of them either living alone or in a single parent household (the remaining 18% were single, never married, and either living alone or with one or more parents or relatives).

<sup>12</sup> 33% of all women workers were divorced and living alone or with their children only. 67% of them were divorced or separated or never married and living with a divorced partner. All among the group of women who were married (28%) earned more than their husbands, who were either unemployed, or in jail, or on low income jobs.

physical, nonetheless more than ever crucial for keeping the factory running. Machine maintenance and -controlling duties got redefined so as to include, under male supervision, work with the shovel and walking long distances on a dangerously run down shop floor to oversee more territory. Women get less paid but their work is not less hard than male work, adding a further layer to the new inequalities of labour.

Typically, it has been the non-divorced company workers' wives who took (i.e. were pushed by other workers) into the company's offer of early retirement that paved the way to staff reduction. While husbands' wages rose, their work became more stressful, for fewer workers had to manage the same work process with aging machinery, and their income more crucial in sustaining households in which the formerly working wives now stay at home without income while the adult children cannot get decently paid company jobs any longer. For the same reasons as their male colleagues the work of those women who had retained their company jobs also got harder, but their salaries did not raise as much as that of male company workers, making their role as providers for their families more difficult.

After restructuring, hiring was almost only for unskilled contract labour. Unlike company workers, contract workers' salaries are simply insufficient to maintain a family, and yet, in most cases, what makes women contract workers hold to their hard and poorly paid jobs is the need to provide for their children and families. I witnessed even cases of pregnant women among the contract workers, taking up the hard, physical job out of necessity. In the factory differences of wages, rights and status were too significant for not to have an impact on factory relations between men and women, company and contract workers. I came to observe how company workers joke and flirt with young female contract workers, doubting their good reputation and trying to take advantage from their vulnerable situation. The latter might abide patiently or quit the job if attentions too insisting, or might consider the advantages of a conditional "surrender" in the hope of improving their situation inside or outside the factory.

Female contract workers were the weakest, most exploited and dispensable lot in the shop floor. Those with a non-Kazakh ethnic background were often divorced and single parents, their motivation being the need to sustain their children in absence of other support. By contrast, Kazakh women contract laborers often were in a marriage and worked in the factory to contribute to the expenditures of their larger families. Nonetheless, while many seek contract work out of lack of better jobs, for some, like Saule, a young mother of four, unskilled contract labour in the factory appears to be preferable alternative to the relative reclusiveness of her status as *kelin* (daughter-in-law) in the troubled household of her in-laws. Dinara, a Kazakh single mother of three, divorced from a man from his village to which she was married aged 16, later on separated from her Ukrainian partner met in town, deemed the low-paid work with the shovel "hard but honest". While at work her underage children were alone at home, a reason for constant worry and cell phone messaging, and yet she found her work preferable to the previous ones, waiting in the cold and with uncertain gain as "prodavshitsa" (street vendor), or to the unpleasant exposure to drunkards and harassers at work as "ofitsiantka" (waitress) in Temirtau's notorious "kafeshka" bars. To many women, especially among Temirtau's newly arrived Kazakhs from Uzbekistan or Mongolia, hard and poorly paid contract work had nonetheless the allure of a "clean" and "real" work (Reeves 2013), conferring access to a working space away from the strictures of the domestic walls and, however imperfectly, an autonomy and dignity and some halt in the social relations at the workplace that many *kelin* struggle to secure for themselves in the home of their in-laws (see Kudaibergenova 2018; Turaeva 2017).



### Marriage models

Russian and Kazakh workers' marriages followed different patterns. In Temirtau, for both Kazakh and Russian workers marriage and kinship networks are essential for accessing wider reciprocity networks on which they rely upon (Nazpary 2002, p. 81-84), but Kazakh kinship networks are much larger and entail more obligations, while the Russian partnership ideal is more focused on the couple's mutual reliance. In the patrilocal Kazakh family model, women's role is more stuck to traditional patterns and family life more absorbing. Obligations include frequent participation to life cycle rituals (causing long absences when necessitating traveling to distant places), family gatherings and, for women, more domestic work for larger households. Such kind of social obligations were more difficult to reconcile with the rhythm of factory work and absenteeism and employment fluctuation were recurring issues, especially among the Kazakh contract workers on the shop floor. By contrast, in the "Russian model" social obligations involving one's kinship rarely collided with the timing of factory work.<sup>13</sup>

Kazakh Muslim women are more reluctant to initiate divorce than Russian women, but the burden of marriage can weight heavily on them and family can be oppressive. By contrast, the Russian women were more ready to argue with their husbands about family roles and duties and voice claims and demands. But Russian workers' marriages were more unstable, despite the fact that the ideal of a conservative and stable family, rooted perhaps in an idealized memory of the late Soviet urban-industrial family (Shlapentokh 1991; Zickel 1991 p.234-9), was being aspired to by the workers. More than in traditional Kazakh marriages, getting married is conceived by Russian workers as being an individual choice based on romantic love regardless of family concerns, but on the long term, marriage is more transitory and unstable than among Kazakh couples, resulting, in practice, in a preponderance of matrilocal single parent households, possibly including other kin and secondary marriage partners.

Male Kazakh narratives often saw Russian marital instability in connection with Russian women's supposed "lack of culture", irreligiosity and immodesty: "They lose virginity before the marriage, have a shotgun wedding and then get divorced" was the sentence of a worker. In women's narratives on Russian marriage patterns the perspective was more articulated:

"Very often couples fall in love and start very young cohabiting. With time, problems arise at home or at work. Men drink, leave the house, after a while they will find another partner. For this reason, there are many single mothers, many of them out of need, some of them out of choice. The children almost always stay with the mothers and their grandmothers, so that typically households comprise a working mother, one-two children (not necessarily from the same partner) and a grandmother or grandparents."  
(Gulya)

When Russian workers expressed their views about the reasons for the frailty of the marriage bond, or sometimes aired their outright scepticism about marriage, they were informed by their own disappointing experiences. Such were those, for instance, of disillusioned workers raised by single

---

<sup>13</sup> Alcohol consumption, regardless of workers' ethnicity and peaking after pay day, was another reason for absenteeism among contract workers.

mothers who had also been working in the factory, of women left by their men with children and no money, of divorced and remarried men feeling “trapped” by onerous alimony payments, or men quitting their formal jobs for informal ones to get around paying alimonies, of working women lamenting “useless” husbands, unable to find adequate jobs able to sustain their family financially, of working parents worrying about their children’s difficulties in getting or keeping married. In such accounts the present of marriage looked always grimmer than in the past: reconciling work with married life –according to many older or former workers with first-hand recollections– had been easier in the Soviet factory, when jobs were available, work collective more cohesive and Soviet welfare more incisive. But reasons for oneself, or for one’s children, to fail to commit, or not to commit, to marriage, either by deferring the choice or by evading it altogether, were manifold and not always transparent. Among Russian male factory workers, for instance, the lack of jobs paying for appropriate family wages, a lack of affordable housing and a generalised insecurity about their future in Kazakhstan<sup>14</sup> were given among the standard reasons against marriage. Female workers also flagged economic and political issues, but also “the mentality of our men” as a factor undermining marital stability and their trust in marriage as such.

“The problem with marriage is that you cannot trust our men. I thought it is safer to have an education, to be able to earn alone. What if you marry and the man leaves you and you cannot sustain yourself?” (Nazim)

This account by a local born and never married Kazakh in her mid-30s struggling with the social pressure of getting married expresses the growing lack of trust in marriage and women’s tribulations in the search for reliable partnership. Feeling parted between her family’s expectations and foisted marriage candidates, the desire for self-fulfilment and the hope for an uncompromisingly trustful partnership, non-marriage was to her the preferable option. While also unhappy with the choice for loneliness, she felt confirmed in her wisdom not to marry by the unhappy, tradition-observing marriages of her former class mates. Although the choice not to marry was untypical for Kazakh women in Temirtau, the doubts, anxieties and fears straddle the ethnic or social divide. Russian and Kazakh marriage models differ, but women’s concerns and preoccupations are similar and oddly sustained by the hard-to-die myth of scarcity of trustworthy and marriageable men, that is, by the purported weakness of women’s bargaining position in the pursuit of suitable candidates for marriage.

### **Workers’ weddings**

In Russian workers’ recollections about wedding celebrations evasive terminologies recurred, some recalling a “domashnaya svadba” (home wedding), celebrated with a handful friends and family in small apartments, away from the fanfare of the Vostok palace, or an unspecific and uncelebrated “grazhdanskiy brak” (civil marriage), an ambivalent term that in local parlance can indicate both the registered civil marriage (“my raspisany” – “our marriage is written down”) at the ZAGS (civil registry office), or merely a cover up for an unregistered cohabitation (“my prosto zhili” - “we just lived together”), thereby leaving both options open and answers purposefully vague. In such

---

<sup>14</sup> Russian workers worry about their future in Kazakhstan as they see the interests and opportunities of the Kazakhs prioritized over theirs by the government. Many have left for Russia in search for better prospects or plan to do so (see: Trevisani 2019).

recollections, wedding celebrations, their own or those of their peers and kin, were often recalled as being simple and inconspicuous – in stark contrast with expectations of lavish wedding celebrations, typical for the Central Asian wedding feasts (*toi*), usually organized for a Muslim marriage.

*Toi* celebrations started to become more frequent in the city since the constant inflow of rural Kazakhs and outflow of Russians and Germans have been redefining the city's demography and ethnic composition. Kazakh wedding houses with pompous names such as "Toibastar" or "Edelweiss" appeared out of nowhere over the last years. But Kazakh nuptial mores are slow at taking foothold in the factory. Temirtau's history as a predominantly Russian mono-industrial town, in which Kazakhs were at the beginning a negligible minority, shaped by migrants from all over the Soviet Union, often with mixed ethnic background, forged a culturally Soviet-Russian work identity, which left a particular imprint on family and marriage habits.

Kazakhs growing up in the world of steel industry had often taken up local, culturally Russian marriage habits that were difficult to reconcile with the traditional Kazakh ones. In this respect, the marriage of a Temirtau-born wagon tippler, the son of a Kazakh steel worker, is telling: "We had no *toi*. My parents were against her – she is half Russian, half Armenian. We met through friends when I started working in the factory, we had fun, she got pregnant, we did *grazhdanskiy brak* (registered civil marriage). Only after seeing the birth certificate of our daughter my parents accepted our union. Relations are OK now, but we don't go to family meetings." Somewhere in between the Russian and the traditional Kazakh model, in the hybrid marriage model of the urban, Temirtau-raised Kazakhs, family relations and obligations retain their importance and men can even marry to other ethnicities (but women almost never do), however, at the price of some renegotiation with their own kinsfolk.

This account of an interethnic marriage with parental disapproval and partial reconciliation contrasts sharply with marriages of recently arrived Kazakhs, who do not have the background in Temirtau's industrial communities, and who invest enormous resources in their kin obligations and wedding performances. In the factory, Kazakhs from Uzbekistan and from Mongolia formed distinct groups, their boundaries were also defining informal affiliations to work gangs and workplace cliques. Newly arrived workers tend to select a spouse from within their kin-mediated communities, all-round providers of connections, resources and security (Nazpary 2002, p. 82 ff.) that are essential for getting by in "alien" Temirtau.

Valikhon, for instance, is a contract worker, 25 years old, Kazakh from Uzbekistan. As an orphan he struggles for a decent wedding and sees contract work, channelled through his kin community, as transitory and instrumental. He met his two years younger spouse two years before we met, through an acquaintance in the neighbourhood. Families were involved but the choice was ultimately with the couple, and thereby "love by arrangement" (Hart 2007). The decision to marry was protracted due to the lack of money and the marriage day postponed until the commemorations of Valikhon's father's death anniversary had been celebrated. Her family is from his village in Uzbekistan. He pays the *toi* by himself, from the meagre savings of one and a half year's work in the factory and on the credit obtained through his employment as a contract worker. Although his wedding is poor and rustic, many colleagues and kin "from Uzbekistan", i.e. contract workers from the shop floor and newly arrived relatives, are invited and involved. By contrast, Nastya, the shop floor's director's Russian stepdaughter, after a period of engagement married a same-aged Russian skilled worker met through her "krug obshcheniya" (circle of friends and acquaintances) and unrelated to her workplace. The couple opted for a civil marriage without a

wedding ceremony, reputed it a waste of money, but afforded an expensive honeymoon travel to Goa. Her muted marriage registration passed without anyone taking notice among the company workers of the shop floor where she got temporary employment through the influence of her stepfather.

What the shop floor director did not do for his stepdaughter was arranged by Amanzhol, a permanently employed company worker, for his son, namely a large and sumptuous wedding ceremony. The *kelin's* (bride's) family was from the same village in Uzbekistan. Amanzhol, a ca. 40 years old Kazakh from Uzbekistan, pious Muslim and father of three, arrived to Temirtau more than a decade earlier, landing on a company job when there were still available. He does not feel at home in Temirtau and struggles to reconcile the worlds of his family and that of his industrial workplace. The hate for the job, the colleagues, the dusty environment, the work itself, emerged over countless conversations. Yet he feels that he cannot leave the privileged and better paid regular employment because of the relative prosperity it provides to his family. The decision to marry off his son, paying for all the expenditures, in a "modern", stylish, middle-class location, compensates him for a life of sacrifice and "thankless work" in the factory. Nonetheless, he did not invite any workmate, neither Russian nor Kazakh, to his son's wedding party at the costly wedding hall, as many a company worker, but only few among the newly arrived *Oralmans*, would have done.

These different accounts of workers' wedding enactments exemplify that different segments of the workforce followed different marriage cultures. Russian and Kazakh, lower- and "middle working class" (see Keskülä 2018b) cultures among industrial workers are in flux and cannot be too rigidly defined, and yet today these variations in marriage celebrations represent increasingly recognizable markers of social distinction in Temirtau's industrial communities.

### **Wasteful weddings**

Among the company workers of the factory, marriage and weddings were reputed a private affair, to which colleagues were rarely invited. It was customary for celebrations involving the workers' collective, one's work brigade or work group, to be reserved for sombre occasions: funerals and retirements, more than marriages or births, were the rites de passage marked by an invitation to a dinner or by an occasional cake at workplace during a break. For many, marriages were deemed too evanescent an occurrence to be celebrated with the work collective. Other workers were uncomfortable with the exaggerated cost of the celebration, condemning the latently implicit competition for ostentation.

While I've heard most workers talking respectfully about Kazakh weddings and praising their elaborate ritual, performance of hospitality and large number of guests, others criticised the waste of money and marked the cultural distance from the marriage habits of "true" (that is culturally Soviet) Temirtauians, by dismissing them with terms such as "ethnic" (*etnicheskiy*) or "native" (*korennoy*). Asked about Kazakh weddings, a young Russian female conveyor belt operator stated "*interesno*, but not our culture". Reproducing widespread prejudice, she resented *Oralmans* for being uncultured and alien to her hometown and lamented growing Kazakh presence in the city and the factory –after work, however, her discretely kept liaison was with her young and divorced Kazakh shift master. In the factory, work and private relations straddle ethnic boundaries, but boundaries remain more marked among the newly arrived Kazakhs from Mongolia and from Uzbekistan.

There were further reasons for workers' resentment against ritual ostentation. Uniting workers with most disparate opinions and backgrounds was the common outrage about the exorbitantly expensive wedding celebration arranged by the Indian factory owner and multi-billionaire for his daughter in a castle near Versailles, in France. Although it occurred years before my fieldwork, workers still remembered it resentfully. Used to be asked for sacrifices by the company at all times, they learned from media reports the cost of the wedding nearing the total annual salary budget of the steel plant's more than 13.000 employed workers and engineers. The workers, struggling every day with their hard and dangerous work, difficult social interactions on the workplace, constantly lamenting lack of money and worrying for debt repayments, felt confirmed in their anger against an ostentatious owner and against "useless, wasteful expenditures", in comparison to which any *toi*, however conspicuous, would inevitably appear as provincial, pretentious and poor. When a shift master, Ukrainian, in his second marriage with a Russian, ridiculed the once-in-a-lifetime purchase of a Tuxedo by a friend for his wedding day, the polemic was more broadly addressed against consumerism's infiltration into workers' lives and in defence of unpretentious wedding ceremonies. Equally distancing himself from the exuberance of the traditional Kazakh *toi* and the "capitalists' weddings", he felt reconfirmed in the Russian (and Soviet) way of (not) doing marriage, thereby echoing many company workers' creed that family and marriage, if not focussed on the shop floor, on the long run can be incompatible distraction from one's work.

### **The factory as a "broken" family**

Workers' recalcitrant, obstinate behaviour at work and their sceptical attitudes against the company were magnified by labour restructuring because it undermined the implicit Soviet factory bargain whereby workers tolerated workplace hierarchies and coalesced in putting more efforts during crucial work periods in exchange for a friendly work environment able to accommodate workers' families and protect their needs and interests on the long term (Müller 2007). The new factory regime challenged shop floor harmony by putting local managers and workers against each other in the drive for cost reduction. Managers' power resided in their capacity to determine work shifts, holiday schedules, work group affiliation, workload, bonuses and sanctions, while that of workers was in their capacity to curb their more than ever needed efforts. In order to motivate workers, local managers still adopted the old paternalistic rhetoric, whereby the shop floor is equated to a family. In this rhetoric the manager resembles to a "family patriarch", a just but severe fatherly provider (Ashwin 1999), the workers being equated to his "children" or "relatives". But in reality, after restructuring, workers experienced that family and work had become barely compatible, since the augmented work rhythm, workplace competition, and the wearing conditions of a run-down and modernization-starved machinery, put new pressures on workers as they struggled to manage newly emerging "work-to-family" conflicts (Bianchi et al. 2010) – be they those of reconciling stress and work fatigue with material and status loss at home and in town, or of preserving oneself from alienation at work and in family or social relations, or -more crudely even-, in those cases where social welfare was most needed and most absent, of workers left to manage their single-parent and only work-and-care-provider households. Regularly employed industrial workers in Temirtau resembled to workers facing problems of reconciling work and family elsewhere (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2007; Presser 2000). Transitory contract workers, especially those newly arrived Kazakhs who were not socialised by family to the world of industry, struggled even more to fully integrate in industrial Temirtau, and thereby, to reconcile the demands of their families (and their frequent

kinship-related obligations) with their newly found industry jobs. The new industrial jobs have less to offer to workers' families as compared to the Soviet factory, and so the support must go the other way around: while work gets less paid and takes a heavier toll on workers' health and psyche, workers' families must absorb, up to a point, the newly created pressures of production, at the risk of falling apart if they cannot.

Recorded shop-floor accounts give an illustration to the above-mentioned dynamics: Typically, male workers who divorced – sometimes from partners who left for Russia or Germany – found a new partner among the single women working on the shop floor. This was the case with all the older shift masters who, over the 1990s and 2000s, had divorced and remarried several times. As to 2013, they were in a partnership with women from their shop floor, regular conveyor belt operators, partners that, as they would say, were neither young nor attractive, but, most importantly, they were in the same brigade, shared a workplace whose difficulties they could navigate together. For men and women, the presence of the partner at work was an ally against the vagaries of moody supervisors or cunning workers, changing schedules, malign gossiping of work colleagues, and a possibility to build up a common routine in life and at work. By contrast, those who did not relate by kin or marriage to the workplace lamented more than others that the factory had become a more difficult place to resist in and considered giving up the certainties of secure employment for a life outside the factory. Workers also often recalled and invoked the Soviet-era rhetoric of the factory as a “family-writ-large”. While to some extent this rhetoric and ideology continues to live on until today, it is increasingly undermined by the new shop floor relations. Irina's mother, for instance, worked as conveyor belt operator all her life in the iron stockyards department DSF. When she quitted prematurely, because of an epileptic episode, the shop floor management decided to offer the job to one of her three daughters, since her mother was a single parent. When Irina turned 18, she of the three got the job because her other sisters were younger. But when she also had an epileptic episode, no manager wanted to incur the risk of being responsible for a deadly accident and she was made to leave. She moved from the better paid work as conveyor belt to a badly paid contract cleaning job. Her husband migrated in search for work to Russia but got into troubles and was jailed for the next 18 years. Her four years old son is with her mother-in-law while she works. All her pay goes for transport, childcare, food for the boy. Attachment to the workplace of her mother certainly had deeper reasons than the low pay. According to management she got her job because of her relations to the “DSF family”. Nonetheless, she lost it because, as the manager said, “...after all, the DSF is not a charity either.”

The former Soviet steel worker family ensured continuity in production. There was a mutual interest between workers and management, in that workers took care of the education and training of their staff and could be held accountable for it by the management (Kesküla 2018a; Trevisani 2019). This has now changed since the company has little interest in holding on to labour dynasties. Labour dynasties are now discontinued and interrupted.<sup>15</sup> Zhenia's father, for instance, was a well-respected senior worker at the DSF wagon-tipling-station. After his premature death in an accident, the son got to start as a loader, a job that does not require skills different from those of an unskilled contract worker, but offers regular employment and better pay. Drinking, shirking, idling around he lost the support of management and his job. By that time, he was 38, two children, one in Ukraine and one in Temirtau, both wives divorced, alimonies detracted from his pay roll.

---

15 In my shop floor survey among 50 contract and company workers who had 46 children over 18 no longer in education, only 3 worked in the steel plant as company workers (and only one in the DSF) – by contrast, in the past, working in the DSF would have been the rule for them.

After a while he re-entered the factory ending up working as a poorly paid contract worker, but not for long, until he quitted altogether for Russia. The DSF managers attempted to keep him in the “DSF family”, as he himself said, but work for Zhenia proved too hard and tedious and the will to keep up with the wearing work abandoned him despite the mutual sense of obligation (his - for the working team where his father had been working for his life, and the management’s for a “son” of the factory).

Workers’ idealized narratives about the factory’s past were contrasting against the present, characterized by ageing, grumpy, dissatisfied workers, in an atmosphere of complaint, diffidence, mutual hostility and lack of cooperation. Restructuring has “emptied” the shop floor and kinship on the workplace has become rarer. The mere presence of kinship might even rise suspicion, since it is seen by those workers deprived of it as a sign of the privilege of the powerful, those who are able to recommend a son, a stepdaughter, one’s lover, etc... for a job at a time of utmost job scarcity. While some workers slandered kinship at work as a prerogative of the ruling group in the factory and as a form of unduly nepotism, the picture was more complex, since managerial work had been turned by restructuring into something that entailed more responsibilities, obligations and risks than rights and privileges.

These circumstances were apparent in the workings of the shop floor’s steering group. Not much of the old kinship pervasiveness has remained on the shop floor, but the shop floor manager chose among relatives and trusted ones to fill the ranks of the shop floor’s steering group, those on whom management can rely in a challenging, thankless work environment, where work must get done even if the machinery is constantly breaking down. His wife’s elder daughter’s (from her first marriage) husband was appointed as shift master, the second daughter (from another marriage) worked in a sub-contracting company on a privileged, more unique than rare desk job, an exceptional position created especially for her. The elder daughter had moved from a dusty shop floor job to an admin desk, earning the envy of the other, more senior conveyor belt operators left behind in the dust of the conveyor belt tunnels. Other key staff were unrelated by kin and yet deeply engaged and identifying with the “cause” of managing the assigned tasks in the interest of the work team.

Rooted in Soviet work paternalism, the “factory-as-a-family-writ-large” concept used by management to motivate workers altered its meaning over the years of labour restructuring – from the Soviet, inclusive “extended family” type of workplace, to a more restricted family of mutual needs and trustful reliance. Working in one team, managing the 12-hours long shift successfully, required reliance on scarce, tired, demotivated workers. Management mobilizes trusted, kin-like relationships to get the shop floor going – (as opposed to the attitude of merely “work to rule” among ordinary workers, but also different from the redistributive patronage relations often lamented by observers of Kazakhstan’s society (for instance Schatz 2004), where privileges are bestowed upon proteges and levies taken on others’ work in the egoistic interest of the own “clan”). As a result of the changing factory regime, family and workplace have developed new forms of symbiosis and interdependence: families and relations are put to work to cushion industrial crises, while industrial crises break up families, reshaping marriage and its meaning.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have paid attention to industrial labour as a factor of stress on the institution of marriage among steel workers in multi-ethnic urban Kazakhstan. Workers’ private lives confronted

different challenges and workers adapted their marriages and partnerships to their increasingly demanding workplaces in different ways. Workers' struggles with reconciling work and family reflect broader, widening inequalities: a growing disparity between those who can and who cannot access marriage, a widening gulf between those who fail and those who succeed in living up to the implicit expectations and obligations entailed in their notions of married life, and the differentiated ways by which workers' communities succeed (or not) in adapting their marriage- and partnership models to increasingly demanding factory work. Following Janet Carsten (2000, p.18), evidence from the Temirtau steel plant demonstrates how shop floor relatedness, forged by "the everyday activities of men and women as they engage in the labour process", creates "kinship where it did not previously exist" – the industrial workplace family. This evidence also shows how the neoliberal factory brings this process to an extreme: flexible labour demands "flexible" marriages, that need to be maximally attuned to the vagaries of everyday work.

Following privatization and shop floor restructuring, family and workplace have evolved as increasingly demarcated spheres of activities and relationality. For Temirtau's diverse industrial communities reconciling these two spheres is challenging each on its own way. Workers' marriage models differ in their ways of putting into practice their crucial social bonds in everyday life, but they are also differently equipped to meet the growing demands of the restructured post-Soviet shop floor. Many among the Russian steel workers, despite their relatively better jobs and houses, were struggling to reconcile their work and private lives and tended to have more unstable marriages as compared to those of the newly arrived Kazakhs. Newly arrived Kazakh workers tended to marry earlier, spend more efforts and resources on their weddings and divorced less often by comparison with the local Russians. But their more absorbing family obligations and their weaker social relations on the predominantly Russian shop floor also tended to detach them from the factory, reconfirming them in their lower position in the hierarchy of industrial labour. In both cases, overturning the more inclusive Soviet practice of the "factory as a family writ large", marriage- and family resources ended up being mobilized for the factory work. As a consequence, workers and families today suffer more under the deteriorating shop floor conditions and struggle to hold on to their marriages, while marriage and partnership are reconfirmed in their importance as vital resources to get hold on jobs and keep jobs workable, or else a luxury that precarized workers are badly equipped to afford.

## References

- ADLER, Marina. 2004. Child-Free and Unmarried: Changes in the Life Planning of Young East German Women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66, No. 5, Special Issue: International Perspectives on Families and Social Change (Dec., 2004), pp. 1170-1179
- ASHWIN, Sarah. 1999. *Russian Workers: The anatomy of patience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- BEHZADI, Negar. 2019. Women miners' exclusion and Muslim masculinities in Tajikistan: A feminist political ecology of honor and shame. *Geoforum*, 100, 144-152.
- CARSTEN, Janet. 2000. *Cultures of Relatedness. New approaches to the study of kinship*. Cambridge University Press.



- CLEUZIOU, Juliette. 2017. Towards Matrifocal families? Relations in Transnational and Single Parent Families in Tajikistan. 311-36. In: Roche, S. (ed.). 2017. *The Family in Central Asia. New Perspectives*. Klaus Schwarz Verlag. Berlin
- . 2019. Traditionalization, or the making of a reputation: women, weddings and expenditure in Tajikistan, *Central Asian Survey*, 38:3, 346-362, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2019.1617247
- CUMMINGS, Sally. 2005. *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite*. London: Tauris.
- DAVE, Bhavna. 2007. *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- EDGAR, Adrienne Lynn. 2007. "Marriage, modernity, and the 'friendship of nations': interethnic intimacy in post-war Central Asia in comparative perspective", *Central Asian Survey*, 26/4, 581-599.
- GEIGER, Kent H. 1968. *The Family in Soviet Russia*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass.
- GIDDENS, Anthony. 1992. *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- HANN, Chris and PARRY, Jonathan (eds.). 2018. *Industrial Labor on the Margins of Capitalism: Precarity, Class and the Neoliberal Subject*. New York: Berghahn.
- HART, Kimberly (2007) "Love by arrangement: the ambiguity of 'spousal choice' in a Turkish village", *JRAI*, 13, 345-362.
- HARVEY, David. 1987. "Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization: Reflections on 'Post-Modernism' in the American City." *Antipode* 19: 260-286.
- HOLMSTROEM, Mark. 1985. *Industry and Inequality: The Social Anthropology of Indian Labour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- KALINOVSKY, Artemy M. 2018. *Laboratory of Socialist Development. Cold war politics and decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- KANDIYOTI, Deniz. 2007. "The politics of gender and the Soviet paradox: neither colonized, nor modern?", *Central Asian Survey*, 24/4, 601/623.
- Karaganda Oblast Census. 2011.
- KARAGANDA. 1986. Karagandiskaya Oblast': Enciklopediya. (ed. R. Nuraliev), Alma-Ata: Kazakhskoy Sovetskoy Enciklopedii.
- KESKÜLA, Eeva. 2018a. "Miners and Their Children: The Remaking of the Soviet Working Class in Kazakhstan", in: Hann, Chris and Parry, Jonathan (eds.). *Industrial Labor on the Margins of Capitalism: Precarity, Class and the Neoliberal Subject*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 61-84.
- . 2018b. Oasis in the steppe: health and masculinity of Kazakhstani miners, *Central Asian Survey*, 37:4, 546-562, DOI: [10.1080/02634937.2018.1492903](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1492903)
- KAZSTAT. 2017. *Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan*. Available online at: [www.kazstat.kz](http://www.kazstat.kz)
- KOZHANOVA, Nazira. 2019. Interference by relatives most common factor in divorce among Kazakh couples – study. *The Astana Times*. 7 December 2019.
- KUDAIBERGENOVA, Diana. (2018). "Project "Kelin": Marriage, Women, and Re-Traditionalization in post-Soviet Kazakhstan". In M. Najafizadeh, & L. Lindsey (Eds.), *Women of Asia: Globalization, Development, and Social Change*. Routledge, pp. 379-390.
- MCBRIEN, Julie. 2017. *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- MCGUIRE, Gabriel. 2017. "Informal Vows: Marriage, Domestic Labour and Pastoral Production in Kazakhstan", *Inner Asia* 19, 110-132.
- MOLLONA, Massimiliano. 2009. *Made in Sheffield. An Ethnography of Industrial Work and Politics*. New York: Berghahn.

- MÜLLER, Birgit. 2007. *Disenchantment with Market Economies: East Germans and Western Capitalism*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- NAZPARY, Joma. 2002. *Post-Soviet Chaos. Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London: Pluto Press.
- PARRY, Jonathan. 2013. Company and contract labour in a central Indian steel plant. *Economy and Society*, 43 (3) 348-374.
- . 2020. *Classes of Labour: Work and life in a central Indian steel town*. Routledge.
- PATICO, Jennifer. 2008. *Consumption and Social Change in a Post-Soviet Middle Class*. Stanford University Press.
- PAYNE, Matthew J. 2001. *Stalin's Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- PERRY-JENKINS, M., GOLDBERG, A. E., PIERCE, C. P., & SAYER, A. G. (2007). Shift work, role overload, and the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 123 – 138.
- PRESSER, H. B. 2000. Nonstandard work schedules and marital instability. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 93 – 110.
- REEVES, Madeleine. 2013. Clean fake: Authenticating documents and persons in migrant Moscow. *American Ethnologist*. Volume40, Issue3, Pages 508-524.
- . 2014. *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Cornell University Press.
- ROCHE, Sophie. (ed). 2017. *The Family in Central Asia. New Perspectives*. Klaus Schwarz Verlag. Berlin
- SHLAPENTOKH, Vladimir. 1991. "The Soviet Family in the Period of the Decay of Socialism", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 22/2, 267-280.
- SCHATZ, Edward. 2004. *Modern Clan Politics. The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. University of Washington Press: Seattle and London.
- SULTANOV, N.E. 2012. *Portret goroda. Temirtau*. Otdel Vnutrenney politiki goroda Temirtau.
- TREVISANI, Tommaso. 2015. "Transformatsiia industrial'nogo rabocheho klassa: metallurgi goroda Temirtau (Transformation of the industrial working class: steel workers of Temirtau)", in: *Materials of International scientific-practical conference devoted to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of E.A. Buketov*. Karaganda: Karaganda State University, 590-595.
- . 2016a. "Under Suspicious Eyes: Work and Fieldwork in a Steel Plant in Kazakhstan", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 141 (2), 281-298.
- . 2016b. "Modern Weddings in Uzbekistan: Ritual change from 'above' and from 'below'", *Central Asian Survey*, 35/1, 61-75.
- . 2018. "Work, Precarity and Resistance: Company and Contract Labor in Kazakhstan's Former Soviet Steel Town", in: Hann, Chris and Parry, Johnatan (eds.). *Industrial Labor on the Margins of Capitalism: Precarity, Class and the Neoliberal Subject*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 85-110.
- . 2019. The veterans' gala: the use of tradition in an industrial labour conflict in contemporary Kazakhstan, *Central Asian Survey*, 38:3, 381-399, DOI: [10.1080/02634937.2019.1609905](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1609905)
- TURAEVA, Rano. 2017. Kelin in Central Asia: The Social Status of Young Brides in Liminal Phase. In: Roche, S. (ed.). 2017. *The Family in Central Asia. New Perspectives*. Klaus Schwarz Verlag. Berlin, 171-183.
- YANAGISAKO, Sylvia. 2003. *Producing Culture and Capital: Family Firms in Italy*, Princeton University Press.
- ZICKEL, Raymond. 1991. *Soviet Union: a country study*. Washington, D.C. : Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.