

# Feminism, Nationalism, Decolonization: Perspectives from Bishkek and Almaty

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**ABSTRACT:** *Since the 1990s, artists, academics and activists both in the countries of the former USSR and in the West have demonstrated that it is possible to look at the ex-Soviet space from a post- or decolonial perspective. However, there is as of yet no developed vocabulary that would address the questions of racism and colonialism from the perspective of the former USSR. Even though anti-racist movements are only now being formed in the region, discussions about racism have long been happening among (queer) feminists. In this article, I analyze how the Russian/Soviet history is perceived by queer feminist activists, artists and scholars from Bishkek and Almaty. Based on the interviews collected during a monthly research stay in these two cities in Central Asia, the study opens a discussion about the ways in which the understandings of Russian/Soviet history and current power relations shape local feminist discourses and networks, thus contributing to the discussions on coloniality and inequality within transnational feminist movements.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Central Asia, decolonization, postcolonialism, nationalism, feminism*

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## Introduction

Since the mid-1990s the authors from the ex-‘periphery’ of the former USSR have demonstrated that it is possible to look at the former ‘second world’ from post- and decolonial perspectives.<sup>1</sup> However, as recent debates around the Black Lives Matter movement have confirmed, especially in Russia, racism and colonialism are considered a problem of the ‘West’ even by critics of the government (Orekh 2020). Nevertheless, in recent years numerous projects with a decolonial stance have appeared in the former USSR – most of them initiated by (queer) feminist scholars, artists and activists (cf. Reznikova 2014; Solovey 2019; Pagulich 2020).<sup>2</sup> I believe that these perspectives need further elaboration especially with regard to Central Asia – the region the history of which Gradskova defines as the most colonial of all parts of the Russian/Soviet empire (2013, 115). In this article, I analyse

how the Russian/Soviet colonialism and post-Soviet coloniality are reflected on by (queer) feminist activists from Bishkek and Almaty – two cities in this region.

Central Asia, a region that consists of the countries of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, is “neither postcolonial nor entirely post-Socialist” and is “informed by local assemblages of socialist and neoliberal ideologies” (Peshkova 2020, 249). This “neither-nor” status of the region might be one of the reasons why scholars continue to debate whether the actions of the Russian Empire and the USSR in Central Asia were “closely fitting the standard models of ‘Western colonization’” (Koplatadze 2019, 478). The advocates of the colonial interpretation (cf. Sahni 1997; Cole/Kandiyoti 2002; Northrop 2004; Tlostanova 2010) believe that the Soviet colonialism was more brutal than that of Russian Empire and that “empire exists even if peripheral populations are convinced that the result of their association with the empire is beneficial rather than exploitative” (Koplatadze 2019, 478). Others agree that the Soviet project incorporated colonial elements (cf. Abashin 2016), but also insist that separate attention should be paid to positive aspects of the Soviet project such as the eradication of inequality, “indigenization” (Khalid 2007, 239), and the emancipation of women (cf. Kamp 2006; Moldosheva 2016; Schurko 2016). In this work, I assume that despite its emancipatory aspects, the Soviet project did leave the former USSR in the condition of coloniality, which is informed by “imperial difference” (Tlostanova 2015, 47) – a phenomenon characteristic of the Russian/Soviet Empire, which both felt itself inferior to the ‘West’ and acted as a colonizer towards its own ‘Others’. The legacy of this ‘double’ coloniality continues to inform the lives of (queer) feminists in the former ‘second world’, especially in its ex-periphery.

A significant amount of literature discusses the gendered dimension of the history of Central Asia (cf. Massel 1974; Alimova 1998; Megoran 1999; Cole/Kandiyoti 2002; Edgar 2003; Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006; Kandiyoti 2007). These authors, from different perspectives on the topic, demonstrate how women in “Central Asia were seen as Russia’s exotic and oriental Others in need of liberation and civilization” (Koplatadze 2019, 482), as well as attract attention to the agency of local activists, many of whom participated in early Soviet projects of women’s emancipation. I acknowledge both perspectives, as well as the work of scholars who contribute to “reinstating the centrality of a postcolonial framework in building a new feminist Central Asian social science” (Behzadi/Direnberger 2020, 3).

The studies of the present of women in Central Asia demonstrate how they are confronted with a “strategic redeployment of notions of cultural authenticity in the service of new ideological goals” (Kandiyoti 2007, 603), with local governments fostering (neo)traditionalist interpretations of femininity (cf. Shakirova 2005; Suyarkulova 2016; Kim 2020) and articulating a “rupture with the Soviet promotion of the ‘women’s question’” (Cleuziou/Direnberger 2016, 196). The works on resistance of women in Central Asia focus on employees of women’s rights NGOs and international organizations (cf. Kandiyoti 2007; Tlostanova 2010; Hoare 2016; Kim et al. 2018), as well as artists (cf. Kudaibergenova 2015). There are also studies which redefine our understanding of activism by showing that it does not have to fit in the rigid neoliberal definitions of women’s rights and equality (cf. Peshkova 2020), as well as works in which local activists and scholars share their own experiences of resistance (cf. Moldosheva 2007).<sup>3</sup> This article adds to these multiple perspectives, representing the ways in which (queer) feminist activists in the region engage with post-Soviet power dynamics – in particular, coloniality and decolonization.

This study is based on 50 interviews with gender studies academics, feminist artists, representatives of grassroots feminist networks, NGOs, foundations and international institutions who live and work in Central Asia. I focus on two cities with the most active LGBTIQ\*

and feminist networks – Bishkek and Almaty. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2019 in person, as well as via Skype. My interviewees have different ethnic and class backgrounds, different access to knowledge of foreign languages and education. They are aged from 18 to 60, either belong to the LGBTIQ\* community or are its allies.<sup>4</sup>

As I am a non-local scholar with no knowledge of local languages and no ancestral ties to the region, my translation and interpretation might not give justice to the complex identities and worldviews of my respondents. To minimize possible misinterpretations, in the article I center the perspectives I encountered in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan instead of my own analysis. I also find it important to stress that even though I describe conflicting views of my interlocutors, I do not take sides in these debates. I believe that it is not me, an outsider, who should suggest local activists and scholars what they should do. My goal is to attract attention of scholars, especially those from Russia and the 'West', to the complexity of feminist debates in Central Asia.

### Feminism, Nationalism, Decolonization: Reflections from Bishkek and Almaty

I take a decolonial stance in my activist and scholarly activity. In terms of writing about feminist activism, this implies approaching the subject with an open mind and not imposing the rigid categories developed in the 'Western' academia onto people with different local histories. This means, for instance, that we can define the activities that usually would not fit into this category as feminist (Peshkova 2020). However, this article equally has another goal – to center the work and thinking of those women, trans\* and non-binary persons who do identify as (queer) feminists. I write the word queer in parentheses to indicate that not all my interlocutors conform to this identification – some prefer to call themselves intersectional, radical, lesbian or eco feminists or to omit any identification.

Because of my specific focus, I did not talk, for instance, to the representatives of women's rights organizations who position themselves in opposition to feminism. My respondents are involved into feminist activism in art, academia, NGO-work and politics. To generalize about my interlocutors, I use the term feminist network, which describes people who do not necessarily have close personal ties with each other. As a network, they are constituted by their common engagement with the topics of feminism and gender equality. In Bishkek, my sample included representatives of local NGOs – Bishkek Feminist Initiatives, Indigo and Labrys, as well as individual activists, artists and scholars with feminist views. In Kazakhstan, I conducted interviews with grassroots activists from KazFem, persons who run a local community center and a feminist festival, individual artists who identify as feminists and employees of a feminist NGO Feminita.

### Identity

The neither fully postsocialist nor fully postcolonial status of Central Asian states (Peshkova 2020), caught between (neo)imperialist ambitions of Russia and the influence of 'Western' institutions is reflected in the ways my respondents spoke about their identity. Before describing their relationships to this liminality, I find it necessary to clarify the usage of certain terms in my work. The Soviet Union insisted on racism being a problem of the 'first' and the 'third world', and today one can also often hear the same arguments. There exists no universally accepted vocabulary to discuss Russian/Soviet racism and colonialism and using

such categories as 'people of color' or 'white' often causes resentment even among scholars with a post- or decolonial stance. However, even though the term racism was coined to explain the mechanism of structural oppression of the "social groups not considered 'white' in colonial and postcolonial settings in Global South and North" (Todorova 2017, 118), scholars from the former 'second world' have already demonstrated that this region was never 'outside' of the racist matrix (Reznikova 2014; Todorova 2017). In the absence of a more localized term, I use 'white' throughout the paper, as this word has also been used by several respondents to describe themselves. "White" here thus means "Russian" or "Russian-passing".

As this article deals with the question of colonialism, it is also necessary to discuss the local relevance of the terms settler and indigenous. Though the histories of Western and Russian/Soviet colonialism differ in many ways, I do find these terms appropriate for the local context. In Central Asia, the indigenous nations are Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Turkmens, as well as such minority nations as Karakalpaks. These nations do not conform to the arbitrarily created borders of the current Central Asian states and can be a majority or a minority in each of them. Central Asia is also home to nations that have come here due to repressions against them in their homeland, such as Uighurs and Dungans. The other inhabitants of the region can be defined as settlers regardless of the ways they or their ancestors have come here – whether the reason was a wish to 'colonize' this land or forceful deportation. Settlers are also not a homogenous group. Some of them would be perceived as 'white', while others do not fall into this category. Those read as 'white' can also have histories of colonial oppression by Russians, like Ukrainians and Belarusians. The relationships between indigenous and settlers are complex – for instance, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Russians feel more commonness towards each other than towards mutual 'others' – Uzbeks or Jews (Faranda/Nolle 2011).

All in all, identity was a source of confusion and trauma for most of my respondents. Kazakh and Kyrgyz feminists mentioned the wounds they had due to the loss of language and traditions of their ancestors. Some of them consciously made steps towards connecting more with the Kazakh or Kyrgyz history and tradition. Those few who spoke Kyrgyz or Kazakh had their own traumas: Ayday (Interview on 12.10.2019) shared how after moving to the capital from Osh, a city in Fergana Valley, she was embarrassed to speak Kyrgyz because of her 'Southern' accent. The interlocutors who grew up in Russian-speaking families felt like they were 'others' to both Kyrgyz or Kazakhs who spoke their native language and the Russian-speaking locals whose families came from other parts of the USSR. The interviewees whose ancestors came to the region from Russia, Ukraine or Belarus also had issues with their identity: they experienced a "constant feeling of being nowhere" (Interview with Alexandra on 28.11.2019) and described themselves as "creoles" (Interview with Katerina on 13.10.2019). The Central Asian dimension of this term was elaborated by the artistic duo Krelëx Center (2016), who believe that the complexity of local identities cannot be narrowed down to national categories. This term helped some of my interlocutors to accommodate the fact that they were perceived as foreigners in the country they were born into and sometimes were even told to go "back to Russia", which they had no connection to – especially those whose families came from Ukraine or Belarus.

Some of my interlocutors agreed that 'whiteness', a category that describes an assemblage of privileges of urban upbringing, education and knowledge of languages, can be applied

to them. Nika (Interview on 17.10.2019), an employee of an LGBTIQ\* NGO in Bishkek, confessed that the constant awareness that she is "from a colonizers' family" made her feel like she was "taking someone's voice", compelling her choice to refuse making a career in her organization, preferring to stay behind Kyrgyz activists. Two non-Kyrgyz activists from Bishkek suggested to use "citizens" to describe local inhabitants without separating them into 'colonizers' and 'colonized' (Interview with Nika on 17.10.2019, interview with Anastasia on 11.11.2019.). At the same time, one Kazakh respondent also remarked that in Kazakhstan a Russian person like me would be considered less 'white', meaning privileged, than herself (Interview with Fariza on 30.11.2019).

In lieu of this fraught background, the complex layers of local identity refuse being narrowed down to the fixed categories familiar to us from the 'Western' context. A 'white' person in Central Asia can be 'Russian' or 'white-passing' and discriminated vis-à-vis Russians. In both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, being 'white' also means a lack of belonging to the local nation state. Due to this, some insist on citizenship being separated from national identity. Others create such imagined identities as "creole" to explain their complex stories of (not) belonging. Representatives of different indigenous groups can be hostile towards each other, as well to the representatives of the same group who are more 'Russified'. Here, intersectional factors such as class and the difference between rural or urban upbringing can equally play an important role.

## History

The relationship to history differed among my respondents. Several interlocutors, mostly from Bishkek, have never reflected on the word colonization used in relation to Central Asia. Those who did have an opinion on the topic mostly agreed that this is an appropriate term to describe the actions of the Russian Empire. However, some also offered more nuanced reflections on this period – like Nadira (Interview on 10.10.2019), an artist and activist based between Bishkek and Moscow: "We did have a different kind of colonization here. North Kyrgyzstan went into the Empire voluntarily, and the Alay queen of the South resisted, but still surrendered." The question about Soviet colonialism triggered more controversy. Several respondents described the Soviet policies as ambivalent. As Nadira said, "On the one hand, the state was centralized, everything was managed from Moscow, on the other hand, two languages were preserved."

Laila (Interview on 02.11.2019), a Kazakh activist and former employee of an international organization, believed that "with the USSR it is complicated, as you cannot understand which nation was colonizing and which being colonized." Some respondents also highlighted the emancipatory aspect of the Soviet project. Anastasia, an employee of an international organization and researcher who came to Bishkek after living abroad for several years, opined that it was problematic to only define USSR as colonial:

"I am against using the same Western language for these spaces. Before a woman could have been sold for a bag of flour, and then one's grandmother could become an academic... But now, as feminism came here with globalization, it refuses everything Soviet as something bad." (Interview with Anastasia)

Alina (Interview on 02.11.2019), a Kazakh activist of the initiative KazFem, shared a similar thought: "For some people feminism is associated with something 'European', but for me

decolonization is also about looking at the Soviet past and finding the numerous examples of emancipated women."

In contrast to this view, there were those who, like Olga (Interview on 28.10.2020), an artist and poet based in Almaty, believed that "real colonization" began with the Soviets. Olga, however, did not see representatives of concrete nations as responsible for that. For her, this responsibility came from the colonization of everyone by "red" Bolsheviks, who also deported her family to Kazakhstan. Some Kazakh activists, however, disagreed with her – especially those who were old enough to have had experienced discrimination in the USSR. Aliya (Interview on 28.10.2020), founder of a feminist NGO from Almaty, who had such an experience, said that "white Russians have to recognize that they are guilty. I had a partner in Moscow, who once said that they need to drop a bomb onto the Ukraine... even she, a lesbian! And after that they want us to be silent about the fact that we were a colony." Some shared the same thoughts, remembering how their parents told them about the discrimination they had experienced from the Soviet Russians.

Reflections on the Russian/Soviet history for most of the respondents were linked to the contemporary political debates in their societies around the term decolonization. This term has multiple definitions – from the struggle for sovereignty over land and resources to the larger-scale process of eviscerating and resisting coloniality across all structures. Decolonial scholars, operating with the framework of coloniality, describe it as a global condition that

"continues long after colonialism is over and flourishes in unexpected and not evident spheres of modern disciplines and academic divisions, in the production and distribution of knowledge, as well as in geo-historical and geo-political situations that do not render themselves so obviously to any postcolonial interpretation" (Tlostanova 2015, 40).

Nonetheless, the term decolonization can impart controversial connotations. Its widespread application has led indigenous scholars to criticize it for supporting "settlers' moves to innocence" (Tuck/Yang 2012, 3). The term is also known to be mobilized by right-wing political movements (Popp et. al. 2019, 2) and is discussed in relation to homo- and feminist nationalism in the countries of Eastern and Southeast Europe (cf. Kulpa 2013; Mayerchyk/Plakhotnik 2019; Pagulich 2020).<sup>5</sup>

## Decolonization, Feminism, Nationalism

Some of my respondents noticed how decolonization was entangled with nationalism in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Meka (Interview on 20.09.2019), a scholar from Tajikistan who studied in Bishkek and now lives abroad, said that "it is non-scientific and reductionist" to call both the Russian Empire and the USSR colonial. For her, the main reason to reject this term was the fact that it might become an excuse for "nationalist discourse". Several respondents from Kyrgyzstan also mentioned nationalism as a possible "side effect" of decolonization – they were especially worried about this in relation to the interethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley. In Kyrgyzstan, nationalism was also associated with the anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ\* movements. However, some respondents from Bishkek said that nationalism might also be necessary at this point, as "civil society in Central Asia is decolonizing", as expressed by Kanykey (Interview on 25.09.2019), an activ-

ist and employee of a crisis center who recently moved from Bishkek to another post-Soviet country. Several Kazakh respondents mentioned that nationalism was necessary for resolving the postcolonial trauma. Other interlocutors from Kazakhstan, among which Alina from KazFem and Aizat (Interview on 22.11.2019), a scholar and employee of a feminist NGO, believed that a real nationalist movement was impossible there.

Some of my respondents, mostly non-Kazakh Kazakhstanis, however, had a different opinion. As Rada (Interview on 25.09.2019), an artist from Almaty now based in the 'West', expressed it, "in Kazakhstan the main ideology is nationalism. Identity becomes equal to history, and Kazakh artists find their histories, but others do not." Olga, an artist from Almaty, described how her former friend began to call her a colonizer when she "posted that the tradition of bride kidnapping is not a tradition, but a crime." She believed that the "younger generation" of local artists reproduced nationalist agendas, using contemporary "design methods." One more non-Kazakh artist from Almaty, Tamara (Interview on 22.11.2019), said that "[t]here is a postcolonial discourse here. And everyone who engages with these questions is active in the feminist movement." Olga reckoned that what was happening was "a swap of colonial with the revanchist, and this devalues both feminism and decolonization."

Some of my interlocutors from both Bishkek and Almaty also referred to a conflict among feminist activists and academics and a group of persons who were described as "decolonialists" (Interview with Nargiza on 28.11.2019) and positioned themselves in opposition to feminism, which they regarded as an iteration of the Soviet attempts to 'civilize' local women. These scholars and artists argued that it was necessary to look into local practices and redefine them as not oppressive and even emancipatory, as Fariza, a Kazakh scholar, confirmed in the interview. Their celebratory approach to "Kazakhness" and simultaneous dismissal of everything "Soviet" was criticized by scholars and activists, who saw it as "a denial of the fact that we have ever been a colony – not decolonization, but a Lacanian relationship", as Nargiza, a Kazakh academic and employee of a feminist NGO, formulated it. Nevertheless, the agenda of "decolonialists" has had an impact on the attitudes to the USSR of some of my Kazakh interlocutors who visited Fariza's lectures.

"Decolonialists" were said to base their arguments on the texts and approaches of Madina Tlostanova, a decolonial scholar from Russia now based in Sweden. As Nargiza framed it, they were "in some kind of interaction with her book", what made them understand decolonization in a manner she disagreed with. Rada supposed that because of the impact of the book in Kazakhstan

"all activists and artists began to speak about the decolonial – the word became hip, and everyone began to do projects about the Soviet times, condemning hunger, repressions... these are ethnically Kazakh artists, and for them decolonization is equal to the fight with the horrible Soviet past and its demonization". (Interview with Rada)

For her, this led to "absolute depoliticization of national art, critical towards the past, but not towards the present". Marina (Interview on 25.09.2019), another artist from Almaty who now lives in the 'West', illustrated this by a recent incident in Astana:

"[T]here was an exhibition about Soviet repressions, and a person came in a T-shirt with the slogan 'You can't run away from truth'<sup>6</sup>. He was sent away with the explanation that a gallery is not a place for political statements." (Interview with Marina)

Kazakh artists, however, disagreed with this generalization – the behaviour of certain curators in Astana was problematic, but the younger generation of artists, as Dilya (Interview on 06.11.2019), a curator from Almaty, said, was global: “We have accepted the Soviet trauma, and there is no pain.” Suinat (Interview on 22.11.2019), an artist and activist from Almaty, also argued that the proposals of activists, such as insistence on learning Kazakh, were not nationalism. She also believed that the artists who frame it this way are “capitalizing on being a victim.”

## Travelling Thought

The debates described in the above section illustrate the complexity of the decolonial discourse in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while nonetheless pointing to how (queer) feminists play a central role. The main debates here revolve around the possibility of discussing the Soviet legacy in a positive manner, as well as around the relationship between decolonization and nationalism. These are the topics also discussed in the literature that my research was based on. The interviews prove that some of these works might also have become a ground on which the opinions of local feminists have been based. While in Almaty the most noticeable was the influence of Tlostanova, in Bishkek only few persons with academic background were familiar with her writing. Daria (Interview on 17.10.2019), an artist and curator from Bishkek, thought that it might be related to the fact that Tlostanova “talked about Central Asian art as if Kyrgyzstan did not exist.”

The School for the Creative Actualisation of the Future (SHTAB) was another important actor in the local debates on feminism and decolonization. This institution which was based in Bishkek from 2012 to 2016 has published several manifestos and a collection of articles (Mamedov/Shatalova 2016), one of the goals of which was to rethink communism. With its agenda of “queer communism”, SHTAB has had an impact on local artists and activists: Bishkek-based feminist artists Daria, Nadira and Dilarom (Interview on 17.10.2019) began their careers there, NGO workers Nika and Mira (Interview on 12.10.2019) said that they became aware of the fact that the Russian/Soviet empire was colonial after visiting events by SHTAB. For all of them SHTAB was also a place where they began to think about the Soviet legacy as in many ways emancipatory. This impact of this institution on the perception of the Soviet heritage stretched beyond Bishkek, helping Kazakhstani artists Rada and Marina and activist Alina to formulate their views about the Soviet past.

While in Kyrgyzstan people tended to criticize Tlostanova, several interlocutors from Kazakhstan had a negative opinion about the influence of SHTAB in Central Asia. Fariza criticized SHTAB for “importing” a foreign agenda into Kyrgyzstan, as none of its founders was originally from Bishkek. Regina (Interview on 8.11.2019), another curator from Almaty, thought that it brought the “rhetoric of aggressive feminism” to the region. She believed that such institution as SHTAB was only possible to create in Kyrgyzstan, due to the “relaxed” relationship to the Soviet legacy present there. Nika, an activist from Bishkek, also linked the difference in perception of decolonization in the two countries to the narratives promoted by local governments: While Kyrgyzstan was dependent on both the ‘West’ and Russia, Kazakhstan was actively “trying to decolonize”. This echoed the research of Shakirova (2013) and Kudaibergenova (2016b), the latter of whom described the policies of the Kazakhstani government as “political postcolonialism” (Kudaibergenova 2016b, 917).

Whereas Olga, the artist from Almaty, argued that the difference in the relationship towards the Soviet past in the two countries was connected to their histories: “[I]n Kyrgyzstan



they had less trauma in the USSR, not two third of the population died there. There is a different perception of the past – like in Belarus. And in Kazakhstan in every family someone died." Katerina, an artist from Bishkek, agreed with her: "Kyrgyzstan is different from Kazakhstan or Ukraine – here Lenin was standing until 2013 and the history museum was entirely devoted to revolution." I believe that it is impossible and unnecessary to compare the contexts of the two countries based on this research. The opinions of my interlocutors, however, indicate that such factors as politics of local government and the prevalence of certain theoretical discourses in a particular locale have an impact on how history is perceived in the region, as well as on the local formulations of decolonial and feminist thought.

## Conclusion

My research has demonstrated that Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are home to active debates on postcolonialism and decolonization. Leading actors in these debates are local (queer) feminist artists, scholars, representatives of grassroots feminist networks and NGOs. Unresolved postcolonial traumas and (neo)colonial dependencies of the countries, policies of local governments, discourses of local and international cultural institutions and NGOs shape the ways in which history is perceived and opinions on colonialism and decolonization get formulated. The activists in post-socialist queer spaces have to deal with the ambivalence of the post-socialist project and its legacies as, simultaneously, colonial and emancipatory. The past, in this sense, lives on in the present and is actively negotiated by these different actors.

The most heated discussions, according to my interlocutors, focus on the understanding of the Russian/Soviet imperial history as either oppressive or emancipatory. Another ground for debates is the intersection between decolonization and nationalism. For some respondents, primarily of settler origin, certain actions of local activists, such as the proposal for everyone to learn the local language, already represented a move towards nationalism. For others, it was not nationalism, but necessary decolonization. The attitudes to Soviet history, especially related to the emancipation of women, as well as debates on decolonization and nationalism influence local feminist discourses, sometimes resulting in conflicts within (queer) feminist networks. As the history of feminist organizing demonstrates, internal debates, such as those between 'white' and 'third world' feminists, are crucial for the development of more inclusive formulations of feminist thought. Further engagement with the understandings of decolonization by feminists in Bishkek and Almaty would make a valuable contribution to transnational feminist debates. In my following publications I will take a step in this direction.

## Endnotes

- 1 Engelhardt, Anna (2020): The Futures of Russian Decolonization. In: Strelka Mag, <https://strelkamag.com/en/article/the-futures-of-russian-decolonization?fbclid=IwAR2KJwmB-wzaJRH73mUTSRX7q4o8dVbKPSjdIE9nOwW1hbwrP5o0aU2fhjRg>, accessed on 20.3.2020.
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- 3 Kudaibergenova, Kim et al. (2019): When your field is also your home: introducing feminist subjectivities in Central Asia. Open Democracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/when-your-field-also-your-home-introducing-feminist-subjectivities-central-asia/>, accessed on 20.3.2020.
- 4 I do not to use real names in the article. When first mentioning a person, I specify their background and current occupation. The interviews were conducted in Russian and translated into English by me.
- 5 Mayerchuk, Maria/Olga Plakhotnik (2015): Ukrainian Feminism at the Crossroad of National, Postcolonial, and (Post)Soviet: Theorizing the Maidan Events 2013-2014. In: Krytyka, <http://krytyka.com/en/community/blogs/ukrainianfeminism-crossroad-national-postcolonial-and-postsoviet-theorizing-maidan>, accessed on 11.5.2020.
- 6 “You can’t run away from truth” is a slogan of the 2019 protests in Kazakhstan. The slogan was written on a banner that was demonstrated during a marathon in Almaty by Asiya Tulesova and Beybarys Tolymbekov. The banner referred to the elections soon to be held in Kazakhstan, from which the ruling party had banned all independent candidates. Tulesova and Tolymbekov were sentenced to 15 days of arrest.

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