

# “PARADISE AT THE FEET OF MOTHERS AND WOMEN”:

## Soviet and Post-Soviet Discourses of Muslim Women’s Emancipation

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### Abstract

During several generations of human life in Central Asia, powerful political and ideological divergence touched women to a greater extent than men. This simultaneously became the subject of several cultural revolutions and social experiments. This article explores forms of emancipation peddled to women, and their confrontation with forms of modernization that local Muslim theologians tried to formulate and defend. In any case, succession of experiments and changes did not remain traceless in the life of women of Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Soviet Islam, female issue, SADUM, emancipation, Soviet modernization.

The phrase quoted in the title of this article comes from a narrative saying of the Prophet (from the Hadith). One of the oldest SADUM<sup>1</sup> theologians, Yusupkhon Shakirov (d. 1996), used it in an article with the symbolic title “Problems of Women’s Equality and Their Resolution” (1977). Shakirov tried to prove the “natural equality” of women in Islam. In addition to traditional sources—the Qur’an and Hadith—he used works of the Egyptian reformer Qassim Amin (“*Al-mara’ Fi-l-Islam* / المرءاء في الاسلام”)<sup>2</sup> and some writings of Muhammad Abduh (see more details about Shakirov’s article below).

Besides Shakirov’s article, I consider various documents and discussion publications since the period of 1917–1918, which initiated vast discourse on various trends by the theologians (reformers and conservatives) relating to the “female issue.” For this article, I used additional sources, e.g., a number of SADUM fatwas and “clarifications” (from 1946 to 1991) focused on the interrelations between males and females in family and social life. Even more SADUM fatwas are dedicated to the criticism of rituals practiced mainly by women (e.g., pilgrimages or *ziyarat* to the graves of the holy people and rituals on the Prophet’s birthdays).

Analysis of the articles in the famous SADUM journal *Muslims of the Soviet East* (published from 1968 to 1991, in Uzbek, Russian, Arabic, Persian, and French) showed that the journal had not practically discussed the “feminine topic” up to 1990. By then, the issue of “returning the Soviet woman to Islam” had been initiated by new Mufti Muhammad-Sadik Muhammad-Yusuf (d. March 10, 2015; mufti 1989 to November 12, 1994). The new journal of the Spiritual Board *Maworounnahr musulmonlari* (*Mawara’ an-nahr Muslims*) published a number of articles in which local theologians tried to avenge years of coercion and silence on the “true look of the Muslim woman.” I also treat some publications by Shaikh Muhammad-Sadik, in which he discussed, for instance, the Muslim woman’s norms of behavior and principles of interrelations with her husband and family.

### ■ The Russian Revolution and the Gender Issue

Major discussion of gender issues among local clerics began right after the Russian Revolution in October 1917. Discussions on the social or family status of a woman and her new dress code in the Muslim environment of the former Russian Empire were determined by two factors:

First, as is well known, the Bolshevik power initiated a number of decrees including those concerning

<sup>1</sup> Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, founded in 1943. See [Babadjanov 2001].

<sup>2</sup> See the English translation of his work [Amin 2000].

women. For example, the famous woman Bolshevik A. Kollontai drafted one of the first decrees with a very symbolic title: Decree on the Emancipation of Women<sup>3</sup>. Naturally, the *ulama* of the former Russian Empire, including Central Asia, responded to such decrees differently. Major issues of the *ulamas*' discussions focused, for example, on different types of *hijab*, on women's opportunities to visit mosques with men, on doing social work, and on working at government offices with men.

The second factor is connected with the internal evolution of the reformation movement among Muslims themselves. I am recalling a number of articles in Muslim journals and newspapers in the Volga River basin (e.g., *Vaqt* and *Ādāb al-Islām*) that published reform articles on gender equality in Islam. Their authors offered arguments for Muslim forms of women's emancipation; naturally, these were from the Hadith and, sometimes, quotations from the Qur'an.

In November 1917, the first congress of Muslims of Russia was initiated and organized by the reformers from the Volga River basin (M. Bigiev, Mufti Riza ad-din Fakhritdinov, and others). Delegates adopted an address to the Muslims of the former Russian Empire, calling for them "to free Muslim women from the chains of slavery and humiliation." The Bolsheviks' influence is readily noticeable in these slogans and their vocabulary. Not only the Bolsheviks but also, for example, the Egyptian reformers, who followed the European reforms in Muslim women's emancipation, used almost the same style and clichés.

The responses of Central Asian Muslims to such reforms, public declarations, and decrees initiated by reformers varied. The *Jadids* (or reformers) of Central Asia were careful in their assessment of cardinal (maximalist) forms of emancipation [Khalid 2015: 197–207, 302, 352].

As for the majority of Muslims (tentatively, I call them conservatives), they reacted negatively to women's emancipation, and it is the response of the conservatives that interests me most of all. The collision of two organizations—"Shurā-yi 'ulamā" and "Shurā-yi Islām/Shurā-yi Islāmiya"—became the earliest examples of regional theologians' internal discussions on the gender issue. The first organization was established as a result of a split in "Shurā-yi Islām" (June 1917).<sup>4</sup> "Shurā-yi 'ulamā" mainly consisted of the conservative theologians who embraced "the inviolability of the main prescriptions of Islam/Shari'ah" in public and political life.<sup>5</sup>

Besides these two organizations' problems of political structure, Shari'ah principles of interpretation and other theologies became conflicts of opinion on the "female issue" (Ayollar/Khotunlar mas'alasi—as it was formulated in that era's publications). *Jadids* from "Shurā-yi Islām" stood for new forms of women's emancipation, insisted on the necessity of their participation in the elections and other forms of public life, their right to work and to receive education, and so on. Their counterpart from "Shurā-yi 'ulamā" opposed any forms of emancipation for the Muslim women that were, in their opinion, enforced by "socialists and Bolsheviks." These positions manifested particularly brightly when elections were discussed with local authorities (with the "Meeting of Founders" and then the "Soviets"). "Shurā-yi Islām" insisted on the necessity of women's participation in elections. Along with this, women had to come to voting stations without *hijabs*.<sup>6</sup> "Shurā-yi 'ulamā" issued a separate proclamation, sharply opposing women's shedding of the *hijab*, indicating that doing so completely violated Shari'ah.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the details, see [Alimova 1989].

<sup>4</sup> The united party "Shurā-yi Islām" was founded in March 1917. The "Shurā-yi Islām members" remaining after the split came mainly from the circle of *Jadids* fighting for Turkestan's national and territorial autonomy. They exclusively rejected the "Shari'ah solution" of the everyday social, legal, political, and other problems, although they recognized Islam's significant role in the formation of laws, in the system of education and of everyday life, and its cultural and historical values. The organization began publishing the *al-Islah* journal that was aimed mainly at the dissemination of modern reformative (*Islāhiy*) ideas. For details, see [Agzamkhojaev 1996: 23–43, 55–59; Agzamkhojaev and Babadjanov 2003].

<sup>5</sup> [Agzamkhojaev 1996: 23–43, 55–59; Agzamkhojaev and Babadjanov 2003].

<sup>6</sup> خطاب نامه، ناشری تاشکند شورای اسلامیہ سی، ۱۹۱۷

<sup>7</sup> حقیقت غہ خلاف تارقاتلکات خطاب نامه غہ جواب، ۱۹۱۷

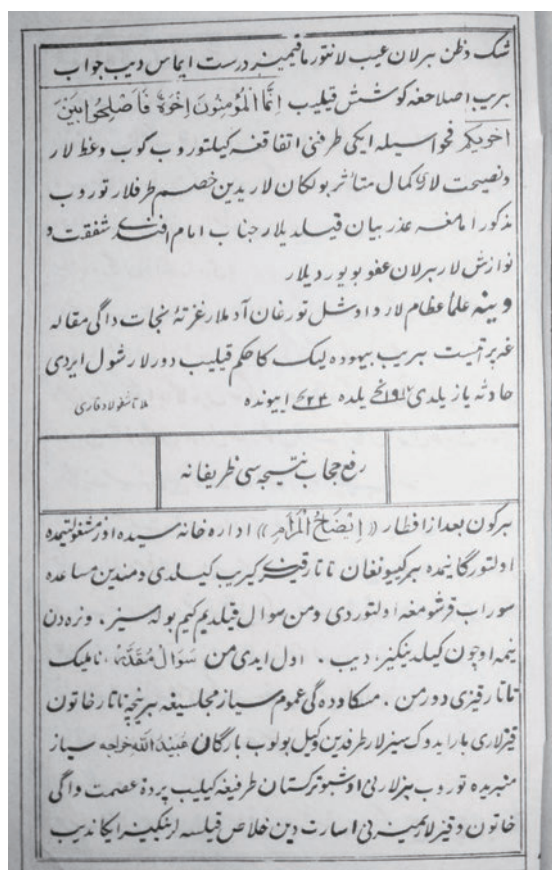


Figure 1

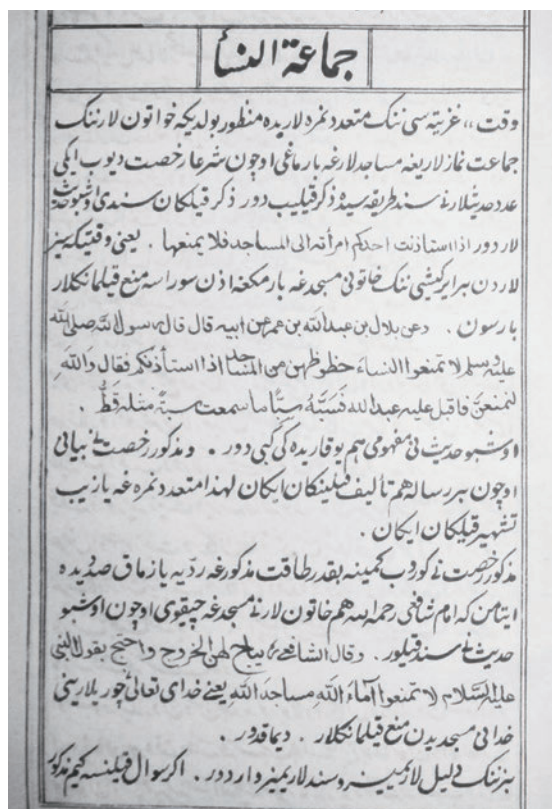


Figure 2

Most often, these “female issues/questions” were discussed on the pages of the famous journal *al-Izāh/al-Idāh* (*Clarification*), which was the “Shurā-yi ‘ulamā” organ. I have counted approximately 20 articles dedicated to the discussion of Muslim women’s family or public status<sup>8</sup>. Here, I refer to only three articles.

The first article from this series (number 2, 1917. Figure 1) is titled “Rafe’ hijob natijasi zarifona” (“Intimate Results of Taking Off Hijab”). Its author, Mullah Pir-Muhammad A‘lam, brought forward arguments against Tatar theologians Musa Beghiey and Riza ad-Din Fakhritdin, who at the previously mentioned First Congress of Muslims of Russia, announced Muslim women’s equality. The article’s main issue focused on taking off the *hijab*, and the author categorically objected to the Tatar theologians’ decision, writing that they took the liberty of opening *ijtihad* gates.

Another article published in number 17 of the same journal was titled “Jama‘ti nisa” (“Women’s Community”. Figure 2). In it, the author ‘Abdulhamid Mahdum, the son of mullah ‘Abdurasul, steadfastly rejected the Tatar theologians’ decision that had brought forward the *fatwa* admitting women’s participation in general praying at mosques. This *fatwa* was published in *Vaqt*, the newspaper of religious reformers in the Volga River basin.

The third article, titled “Muhākama” (“Discussion”. Figure 3), was published in number 20 of the journal. The author, Kholli-Muhammad Tura-Quli, was a theologian from Mercke town (today’s Kazakhstan). He also got into an argument with the Tatar reformer Muhammad Khanifi, who published an article in the journal *ad-Din va-l-ādāb*, titled “Khotunlar massa’lasi” (“Female Issue”), which he wrote under the great influence of *al-Mara’fi-l-Islam* (*A Woman in Islam*) by Qassim Amin, the Egyptian reformer mentioned above. The article raised the issue that following Shari‘ah, a woman must not be isolated at home; she must be respected, permitted to talk with strangers, and so on. Kholli-Muhammad responded sharply, rejecting these appeals for “women’s emancipation” as a complete departure from the norms of Shari‘ah.

The remainder of the articles in this journal were written in the same style, refusing women the right to take part in public life or to change their mode of living or style of clothing. In brief, the Central Asian conservatives categorically refused to accept any forms of emancipation of Muslim women.

I have omitted the analysis of the authors’ theological arguments. A different circumstance, which I call the “phenomenal transformation” of the Bolshevik epoch, seems more important.

By this, I mean the circumstance that the descendants of these authors became major actors and even

<sup>8</sup> See also [Khalid 2015: 198].



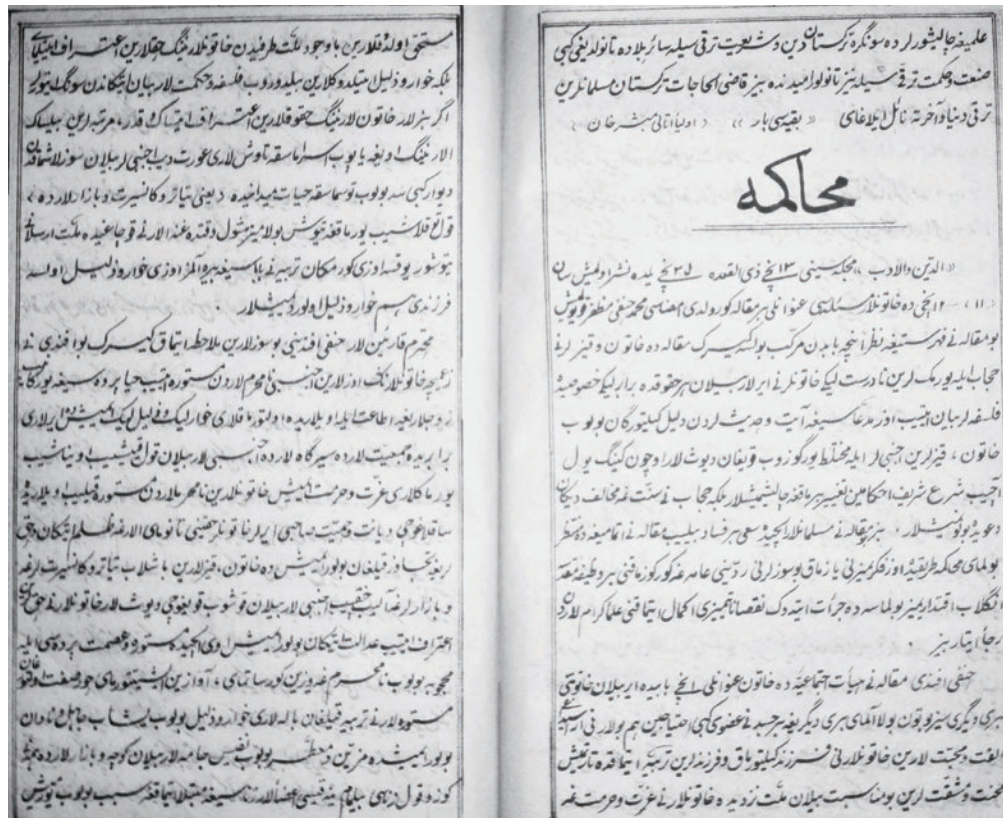


Figure 3

initiators of Soviet forms of women's emancipation.

For example, I refer to the book written by the great-granddaughter of the conservative Hol-Muhammad Tura-Quli. This is the saga of his descendants—the Mahkamov family—written by his great-granddaughter Feruza Guliamova (maiden name Turaqulova) [Guliamova 2015]. As seen from the book's content and particularly from photos and texts, the Tura-Quli family (the Turaqulovs) served as a prime example of the complete emancipation of women but, of course, in the Soviet style. At that, judging from the authors' information and the elder generation's reminiscences, it is completely obvious that members of this family (like many similar Tashkent families) did not become only the object of the Soviet forms of emancipation. The Turaqulov women were also initiators of Soviet forms of modernization and became the most illustrative examples of women's changed mode of life during their epoch. The same occurred with the descendants of the authors of the other two articles. For example, 'Abdulhamid Makhdum's (or Makhdum-zoda's) descendants joined the Bolshevik party and played a worthy role in the ideological propaganda. Mullah Pir-Muhammedov's descendants also became celebrity actors of the Soviet theater and cinema and served as exemplars of the Soviet emancipation of women.

I do not want to evaluate these phenomena from the viewpoint of everyday ethics or of laws (genres) of literary essays. Instead, I want to draw attention to how Soviet reforms quite unexpectedly changed personal, family, and social ethics and even the identity of the whole families, seriously reconstructing them. We see how the religious ethics of former social and kin networks acquired completely opposite ideological forms (often atheism) that were emphatically unacceptable for their ancestors.

## ■ “A Free Woman of the East Must Remain Chaste and Faithful to Her Family!”<sup>9</sup> Alternative Scenarios of Emancipation

The de facto establishment of SADUM meant the return of the religion into the social field—subject, of course, to conditions dictated by the authorities. But SADUM managed to introduce amendments into these rules in the conventional “social field” in this or that form, clashing with the aggressive forms of Soviet ideology (atheism).



Figure 4

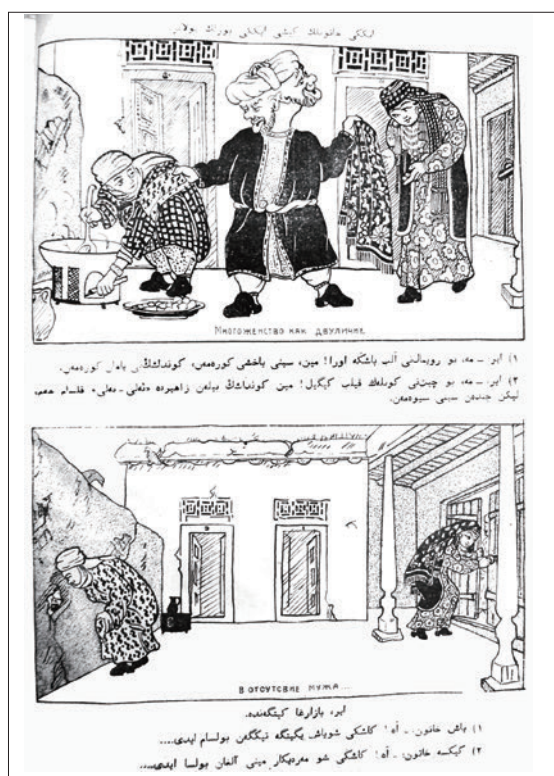


Figure 5

SADUM theologians' addressing the issue of gender equality in Islam is not accidental, but a response to total criticism from atheists and participants in the movement for women's emancipation that had rather a remarkable name *Hujum* (Attack).<sup>10</sup> I believe that SADUM participated in the movement for women's emancipation in the context of latent conflict between *Hujum* theologians and activists.

Many books were published about this movement within the frameworks of Soviet propaganda and the Sovietological school.<sup>11</sup>

Just as a reminder, propaganda against “religious fanaticism” slopped over onto the pages of satirical magazines. Highly influential, the famous magazine *Mashrab* had a substantial run of 140,000 copies (1929).<sup>12</sup> A number of satirical pictures from *Mashrab* are shown here. Figure 4 is an illustration showing the feelings an emancipated woman following European dress code really raises in a Muslim man.<sup>13</sup> Figures 5 and 6 are satirical pictures criticizing polygamy that leads to scandals within families and to the exiling of elderly wives from homes without maintenance. Publication of posters



Figure 6

<sup>9</sup> There is a quotation from the speech of Mufti Ishan Babakhan at the second SADUM plenary meeting (1947).

<sup>10</sup> For details, see, for example, [Alimova 1989; Northlop 2004; Kamp 2006, 2014].

<sup>11</sup> One relatively recent and recollected work by Marianne Kamp and Adeeb Khalid. There are also references to the comprehensive bibliography in that work.

<sup>12</sup> № 3, 1929, the back of the title page.

<sup>13</sup> Without particular finesse, the author depicted men whose mouths literally water when they see the “open woman” who should obviously be understood as the sign of sexual appeal. This simple device (also judging from the text) aimed to reveal the hypocrisy of those men who stood against the emancipation of their own wives, but were pleased to “communicate” with emancipated women.



with primitive but common symbols of Soviet women's emancipation caused particular interest. In Figure 7, for example, there are all symbols of new life and new ideology. Perhaps, this is a shrine of the new faith (i.e., the Communist faith). Apparently, this is a copy of Zeus's shrine in Ancient Athena, showing not Zeus's but Lenin's portrait. "Ma'arif" ("Knowledge") is written next to it. The woman in the picture has no *hijab*, but wears a kerchief on her head. With a peculiar gesture, she calls to knowledge. There is a globe and something symbolizing knowledge in the lower-right corner of several books. On the right, in the remote background, there are ancient buildings with domes—symbols of the Old World. The Sun also symbolizes the bright (Soviet) future.

Even more posters were published on March 8, i.e., on the Women's Day. Take, for example, two covers of the same *Mashrab* journal (see figures 8 and 9). Here, symbols of the Soviet form of emancipation are even more obvious: "Free women of the Muslim East" (but notice—the kerchief is on!), red banners in hand, surrounded by extremely negatively and grotesquely depicted mullahs. These are portrait forms of criticism of the Old World in the context of the women's emancipation movement. This is the de facto gallery of Hujum, whose members never concealed their dislike for theologians.

We find informal "answers" of the Muslim theologians in their rare diaries and memoirs<sup>14</sup>. Official "feedback" from conservative Muslim *ulamas* came later, after the end of the Second World War. This feedback is connected with SADUM activity. The first forum (*Qurultai*) in which SADUM officially addressed the "women's issue" was the Second SADUM Plenary Session (January 20, 1947) (see figures 10, 11 and 12). At this session, chief SADUM Mufti Ishan Babakhanov (Ishān Bābākhān) spoke



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

<sup>14</sup> I have a copy of the diary of the oldest worker Nodirhon domulla (d. 1978) in my archive, where the author carefully speaks about the aggressiveness of such movements as Hujum.

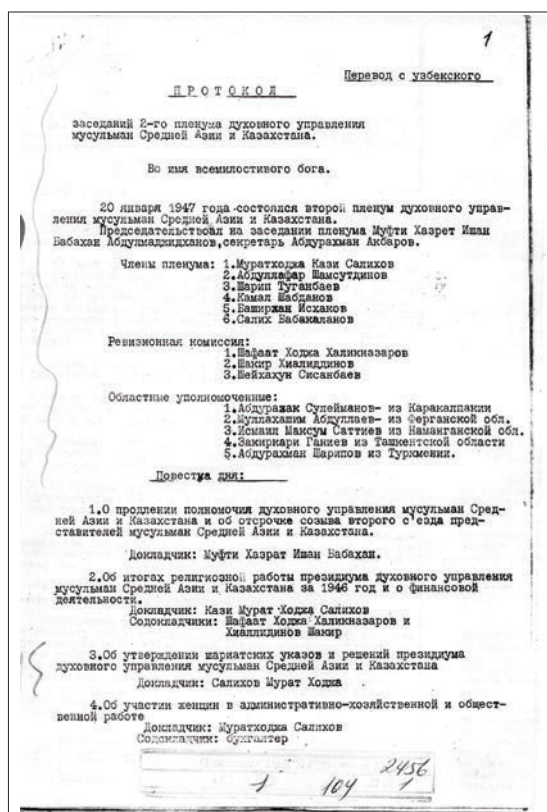


Figure 10

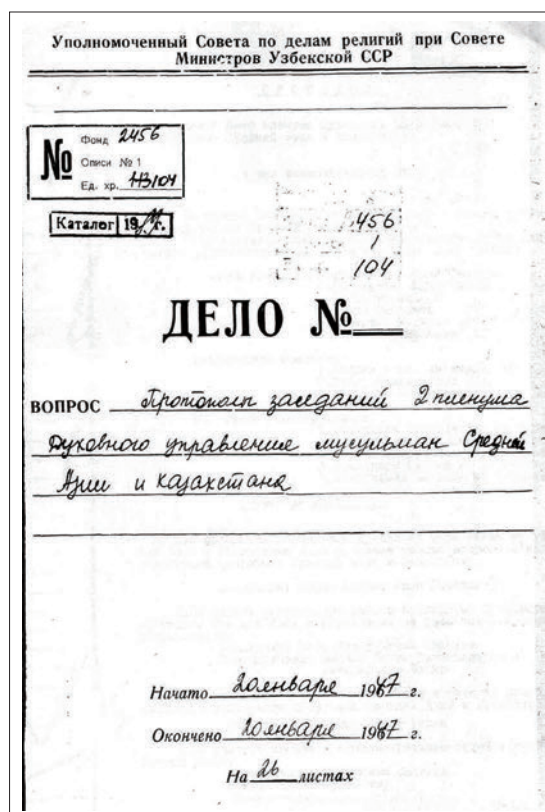


Figure 11



Figure 12

Moreover, the theologians insisted that despite the woman of the Soviet East taking part in social labor, she must not forget that she was a wife and mother in a Soviet family.

Simultaneously, Mufti Ishan Babakhanov carefully formulated his understanding of the forms of Muslim women's emancipation. For instance, he said that Islam did not prescribe Muslim women's wearing of the *yasmak* (*hijab*) and that wearing a kerchief (*ro'mol*) was sufficient. He declared this important from the perspective of hygiene. He referred to a female's hair quickly getting dirty without a kerchief and to frequent hair washing leading to its loss. Besides that, lost hair may fall into food being cooked, and so on. Thus, as in the photos, we see an alternative dress code for Muslim women.

Mufti Ishan Babakhanov also spoke about the positive side of the Islamic doctrines, treating a woman

<sup>15</sup> I examined a photocopy of his speech in Arabic script (with amendments and additions in the margins) in Shaikh Abdulaziz Mansur's archive, and I express my gratitude to him for this. The speech in the archive has been preserved as a short thesis in the Russian language. See: *O'zbekiston markaziy davlat arxivi* (OMDA), fond 2456, opis' 1, delo 104. Il. 12–22.



as a mother, heart- and home-keeper, and major child-minder. He also declared that Islam does not oppose a woman's involvement in social life or her right to work next to men while maintaining norms of decency and remaining modest and faithful to her husband without forgetting about her family. Thus, the Mufti carefully proposed his forms of women's emancipation, but in his speech, gratefulness to the government sometimes sounded like routine ideological decoration for official speeches. I look upon similar Soviet ideological clichés not only as trite compliments addressed to the authorities. First, they manifest the political conformism traditional to local Hanafyah theologians. Second, I see in them SADUM's readiness to play by the authorities' rules, in order to legalize their participation in women's emancipation, but by trying to introduce their own rules into this sensible game, their own understanding of forms of female dress code and of female behavior and status in the family.

Murat-kho'ja Salikhov made the next report at the same Plenum, "On Women's Participation in Administrative and Social Work." Judging from his short thesis,<sup>16</sup> this report was fully based on Mufti Ishan Babakhanov's report. In conclusion, Murat-kho'ja said that according to the Islamic dogmas, women's involvement with the administrative management and social life next to and on equal terms with men at factories and in agriculture is acceptable from the viewpoint of the Islamic prescriptions. Nevertheless, there was no reference to arguments either from the Qur'an or Hadith.

At the same time, SADUM seriously criticized women for their commitment to the rituals connected with the prevailing local forms of Islam. In this sense, SADUM's criticism targeted some women attuned to criticism of the official Soviet ideology. One illustration in *Mashrab* (№ 12), drawn in the familiar Soviet satirical style, depicts (see figures 13 and 14), in the center, a woman wearing the veil; she has come to the grave of a holy man where the "*Chil Yā-Sin*" ritual (i.e., a forty-time reading of Ya-Sin surah from the Qur'an) is exercised. Usually, women exercised such rituals sincerely, believing in the abolition of misfortunes and diseases. Literally, SADUM's great tornado of criticism (in hundreds of *fatwas* and instructions) wracked "*Otin-oyi*" women who initiated similar traditional rituals (e.g., *Aqiqa* and *Mawlud an-Nabi*). At the same time, not only women who closely adhered to religious customs performed these rituals but emancipated women also took part in them [Kandioti and Azimova 2004; Alimova and Azimova 2000]. Thousands of known SADUM documents sharply criticized women's commitment to such rituals, asserting that they had nothing to do with Islam.<sup>17</sup> On this point, criticism

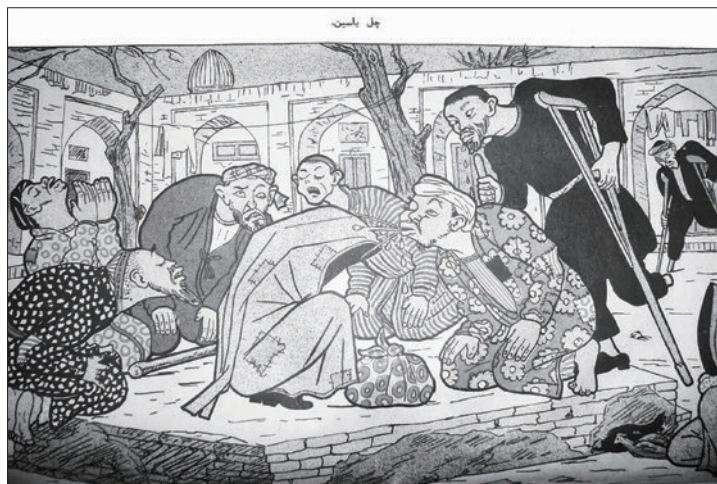


Figure 13



Figure 14

<sup>16</sup> OMDA, fond 2456, opis' 1, delo 104. l. 27.

<sup>17</sup> For example, I can refer to SADUM's ordinances dated 1967, 1972, 1973–77 that replicated previous *fatwa* and SADUM ordinances containing criticism of "rituals and rites that had not been allowed by Islam." Women were the main object of criticism in these documents. See our article (with references to documents) [Babadjanov 2001: 67–77].



of women by Soviet ideologists and SADUM completely coincided. However, their argumentation, naturally, differed.

Later on, the majority of SADUM *fatwa* related to women, their rituals, and customs were rewritten and published with new arguments. At the same time, these *fatwa* and SADUM “ordinances” (*buyruqlar / rasporiazheniia*) were replicated until the end of 1989 [Babadjanov 2001: 67–77].

In the 1950s, the number of women’s suicides rose, due to domestic dramas in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. A study of this issue revealed that conflicts emerged because some husbands, referring to “prescriptions of Shari‘ah,” prohibited their wives from leaving the home, becoming employed, and communicating with other women. In such families, women (mainly the young) were actually locked up. Desperation and hopelessness spurred some of them to suicide. Many women dared to address the prosecutor’s office or party committees. Consequently, the response from the Committee on Affairs of Religious Cults required that Mufti Ishan Babakhan compose a corresponding *fatwa* and present articles on the issue of women’s status in Islam<sup>18</sup> for publication. The *fatwa* was, ironically, composed as clarification of the prohibition of suicide in Islam<sup>19</sup>. The causes of the suicide problem, however, had not been addressed or resolved.

As previously stated, the authors in SADUM’s journal *Muslims of the Soviet East* did not practically, directly address the issue of forms of women’s emancipation, particularly the Soviet dress code. Obviously, discussion of the “woman’s issue” in the context of religious prescriptions was forbidden by the official authorities.<sup>20</sup>

Theologist Yusupkhon Shakirov, mentioned above, tried to violate this taboo and prepared for publication “Problems of Women’s Equality and their Resolution.” He relied on the works of the Egyptian reformers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, adapting them to his contemporary fundamentals. The context of some arguments shows that the article responded to the usual Soviet ideological apparatus attack against the “Islamic orders that humiliated and enslaved women.” As far as we know, the article was not accepted for publication for the unknown reasons, but, in brief, it was sent to some large mosques in Uzbekistan and to the neighboring republics (the article’s first printed page is shown in figure 15).<sup>21</sup>

In the article, Yusupkhon Shakirov purposefully accentuated the section “On Women’s Position before Islam” (pp. 1–2 of the article’s printed copy), trying to prove that just the introduction of the Islamic prescriptions freed a woman from the “humiliated position” she had been in previously. Following the established tradition, the author referred to the “barbarian traditions” practiced before the emergence of disorderly Islamic marriages (including close relatives and endogamy), women’s lack of economic rights, the assassination of newborn girls, and so on. In the next section, “Women’s Position under Islam” (pp. 2–3), Shakirov named the advantages and rights a woman received in Islam, particularly in a family (with references to the Qur’an and Hadith). He tried to rebut his opponents’ assertions, writing “of the scientific

<sup>18</sup> In the Committee’s publication, this requirement replicated the style of Soviet agitation leaflets, “... prove the equality of men and women in Islam from the point of view of Shari‘ah prescriptions; explode fallacy of the allegedly existing provision that the wife must be in a slavery position for her husband...” [OMDA, fond R-2456, opis’ 1, d. 162, ll. 24–25].

<sup>19</sup> OMDA, fond R-2456, opis’ 1, d. 162, ll. 27–32.

<sup>20</sup> Shaikh Abdulaziz Mansur confirmed this supposition of mine (he worked with SADUM from 1976 to 1990. In 1978, he opened the Fatwa Section in the structure of the Department. Nowadays, he is deputy Mufti of the Muslim Department of the Republic of Uzbekistan). Following Shaikh’s words, SADUM theologians limited themselves to oral clarifications of issues of family ethics, particularly for women (personal interview, January 10, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> According to the information from Shaikh Abdulaziz Mansur, the Committee on Religious Affairs requested that the author discuss the *hijab* issue and prove its wearing to be non-obligatory. The author mildly refused to discuss this issue, and therefore the article was not accepted for publication; its first copies were destroyed (information provided by the oldest SADUM worker—K.Sh.) I managed to discover the fourth copy of the article’s typed text in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan [Shakirov 1977].

atheists," who asserted that in Islam, a woman was just an object of pleasure and enslavement (p. 3).

Shakirov addressed his principal arguments vis-à-vis those of atheists, as usual appealing to some *ayat* of the Qur'an that allegedly diminish the status of women and prescribe "domination of men" (e.g., 2: 223; 4: 34, 38). Shakirov interpreted them in the sense that indeed these and similar *ayat* of the Qur'an should be understood as entrusting significantly greater obligations to men (e.g., provision for the family and its protection) compared with women. However, in no sense should these *ayat* be understood as prescribing a man to "be a tyrant of the family and full proprietor of a woman" (p. 4). Shakirov wrote, "[Man's] privilege means that a husband [in the family] bears more responsibility than a wife." He draws attention to physiological differences between men and women that determine the specificity in their social status and role in the family. Shakirov again refers to *mufasssirs* and to the works of Amin Qassim and Muhammad Abduh.

This article's last section is most interesting—"Women's Emancipation in the Soviet Union." The first sentences demonstrate that it was written in the usual Soviet publication style: "The new era was open for women after the Great October Revolution and establishment of the Soviet power. For the first time in history ... a woman acquired complete freedom and true equality." Further on, the section highlights positive changes in women's social status, privileges provided to women in the USSR, and so on (pp. 5–7). The reader notices the differing styles of Soviet agitprops and Shaikh Abdulaziz Mansur, who was aware of this article and even saw its original version in the Uzbek language. Mansur asserted that this last section was written by an employee of the Committee on Affairs of Religion and International Concord (ordered to be completed by March 8). Shakirov agreed to additions in the form of ideological decoration, usual for those times, to facilitate censorship and achieve publication<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, despite such a compromise, the article was not approved for publication. Shaikh Abdulaziz Mansur supposed that in reality, starting with the epoch of Nikita Khrushchev (1954–1964), SADUM was dismissed from discussions of the "women's issue."

## ■ "We Must Return Our Women to the Path of Islam." Revision of Results of Soviet Emancipation

SADUM again returns to discussion of the "women's issue" when the famous regional theologian Muhammad-Sodiq Muhammad-Yusuf (MS MYu) assumed the mufti's office in March 1989. In his speech at the extraordinary *qurultai* (dedicated to assumption of the SADUM mufti's office), among other issues, he insisted, "Islam should be defended from fault findings," "purify the Divine religion from accusations," and so on. MS MYu remarked that mostly atheists and theologians of the past slandered Islam's religious prescriptions on attitudes towards women, their position in the family, and their rights and duties from Shari'ah viewpoints. At the same time, he criticized frequent divorces and

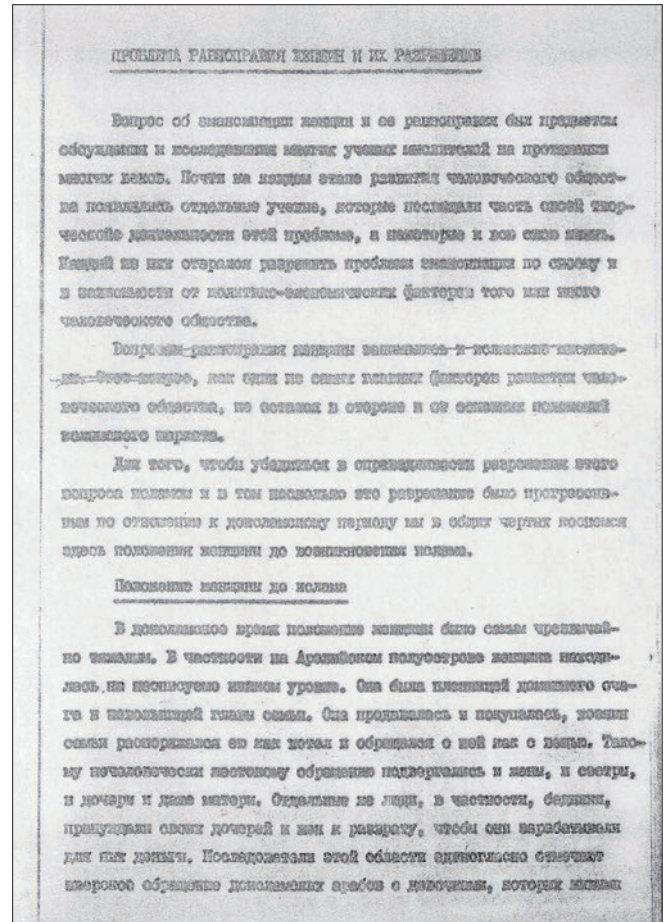


Figure 15

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview, January 10, 2016.



the rising number of prostitutes from the “Muslim nations” (i.e., Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, and Kyrgyz women). In the new mufti’s opinion, the reason for the growth of family and social problems lay in the forgetfulness of Shari’ah prescriptions. “We must return our women to the path of Islam,” MS MYu declared, “but through patient and insistent clarifications.”<sup>23</sup> MS MYu permanently followed this principle and was the most productive (from the viewpoint of a number of publications) theologian in the region. His essays are highly popular, but limited because they are not always adapted to ordinary readers.

Between 1989 and 1991, MS MYu himself broadcast many times on radio and television and published a number of articles in local mass media on family issues, wives and husbands’ duties regarding mutual relations, attitude to children, parents, and relatives, and so on.<sup>24</sup> Naturally, his speeches and articles were current and sharply focused, but always with references to the Qur’an and Hadith. In his work, MS MYu clarified norms of religious ethics in families, carefully called for their adherence; this, as he supposed, was to strengthen families, return to “the customs of fathers and grandfathers checked with the times.” At the same time, he did not raise the *hijab* issue or other prescriptions and ritual obligations of women, sometimes adding that on other points of interest, women could seek consultations in mosques or at the SADUM Department of Fatwa. Later on, he explained his cautiousness as due to the fact that he had to consider the wishes of contemporary newspaper, radio, and television editors<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, he was deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (i.e., of the Soviet parliament).

Simultaneously, there appeared theologians and new *imams* in the renewed SADUM that occupied more radical positions regarding “revival of the Islamic family.” They used for this purpose *minbars* of mosques, traditional rituals (meetings), and so on, to which *imams* were invited. Many times from 1989 to 1992, I had to listen to presentations from new-generation *imams* (in Kokand, Andijan, Marghilan, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent) who severely criticized the results of Soviet women’s emancipation and insisted that women should be removed from all public offices, factories, and plants, and even from educational institutions. They also insisted that the Soviet women’s holiday on March 8 should be dropped.

Particularly stormy was the discussion initiated by the Uzbekistan Government, accurately called “On Conscientious Maternity” (May 1990); following this, there was a proposal to restrict the number of children in families (depending on demographic problems) using, for instance, special medications (contraceptives) and, as a last resort, abortion at legal medical institutions. With the connivance of MS MYu mass and, often rather radical public speeches<sup>26</sup> by *imams* with sharp objections against attempts to introduce a law opposing Shari’ah prescriptions at all the mosques, the initiative was abolished. It was the first victory by the opponents of the Soviet forms of modernism.

The “Wahhabi” occupied the most radical position in such issues; it could be qualified as an extremist.<sup>27</sup> However, their proposals regarding “returning women to Islam” almost coincided with the proposals of their vis-à-vis from the “solid Hanafyah.” At the same time, the leader of the “Wahhabi” of the Fergana valley, ‘Abduvali-qori Mirzaev, insisted that a place should be allocated for females to pray in

<sup>23</sup> Videocassette from the author’s archive.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, a number of his articles in the newspaper *O‘zbekiston adabiyoti va san‘ati*, which is popular among intellectuals (numbers of 23 February, 1990, 6 June, 1990, 5 November, 1990, and so on). During the interview, MS MYu said that wearing the *hijab* must be an inviolable prescription of Shari’ah.

<sup>25</sup> From my interview with MS MYu (November, 2005). Mufti remarked that Perestroika had changed attitudes to religion, “but anyhow, that was the Soviet time.”

<sup>26</sup> I taped one of the Friday speeches (sermons) given by the Imam of ‘Abdi-Darun (Samarkand) on June 10, 1990. Imam (K.Sh.) declared, “Yet 7 or 8 years ago, Muslim theologians would not hush up insults. Now, the times have changed, and Muslim consciousness has awakened. Therefore, they do not allow biting the thumb any more at prescriptions of our holy religion Islam.”

<sup>27</sup> For details about them, see [Babadjanov and Kamilov 2001].

his mosque (Andijan Jāmi'). His opponents sharply objected to the involvement of women in mosques, referring to Hanafyah prescriptions.

In any case, along with the abolishment of limitations in "religious matters," apparently, the actuality of hard-and-fast rules, symbols, and ideological clichés of Soviet times were being lost. At the end of 1990, MS MYu initiated the decision to rename SADUM's journal *Muslims of the Soviet East* as *Muslims of Mavara'an-nahr* (*Muslims of Transoxiana*), and in 1991, the journal began publication under its new name. First, it stopped submissions to the Committee on Affairs of Religion and International Concord for censorship editing and approval to print. Second, there appeared a number of articles criticizing atheism, Soviet forms of modernism, and the fashion of "Westernism." The same criticism arose in regard to the behavior or dress (e.g., wearing mini-skirts and trousers) of contemporary women in Uzbekistan and in the region; they were accused of betraying their ancestors' customs and religions<sup>28</sup>.

The journal had one more significant feature in its articles—the use of preferably traditional argumentation appealing to provisions of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Hadith). As for the "women's issue," authors mainly preferred to comment on the famous *ayat* of the Qur'an or Hadith, fully ignoring recent obligatory Soviet ideological clichés. In other words, the editorial board of the renamed journal attempted to refit discourse about women and their status into the framework of purely Muslim tradition.

For example, let us examine the article of a theologian of the Department Muhammad-Latif Djum'an—"Qualities of an Adherent Woman" [Muhammad-Latif 1991]. The author tries to interpret the 12<sup>th</sup> *ayat* of the 60<sup>th</sup> Sunni of the Qur'an, which calls for taking women who "will not place the copartner under Allah's control, will not steal, commit adultery, and kill their children, and will not lie..." Muhammad-Latif supposes that this *ayat* points to women having more negative features than men. Just this vests obligations in men in relation to women and places a husband over a wife (i.e., gives the right of control within the family relations). The author comments on each of the named prescriptions, mainly from the viewpoint of criticism of women, who, as he implies, adhere to "unallowed rituals" (like worshipping "holy" graves), often lie, and are unable to bring up their children correctly without the involvement of men. On the whole, the article's style, its vocabulary, and argumentation are close to similar essays and comments from medieval times.

Unlike such a radical position among his co-workers, MS MYu remained faithful to his principle of tactical clarification of issues connected with the rights and obligations of Muslim women in the family and their behavior in society. He dedicated a number of his publications to these topics as articles and booklets that he enumerated in one of his latest books dedicated to family [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 9–10, 212–214]. This book, *Happy Family* (500 pages), summarizes his previous publications devoted to the Muslim family, women's status within it, Shari'ah marital rules, resolution of internal conflicts, etc. In point of fact, MS MYu presented Muslim norms of family ethics and their role in society and in the preservation of traditions.

MS MYu does not conceal his critical attitude towards slogans about "equality," "freedom of a personality," "sexual revolution," and similar Western theories and movements, whose influence upon Muslims, in his opinion, "weakened religion and century-old traditions," "negatively influenced the stability of families," and led to tragedies [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 4–8]. *Happy Family* calls for a return to ethical norms in the selection of a groom or bride, following Shari'ah prescriptions. MS MYu clarifies rules of acquaintance and marriage that, in his opinion, have been forgotten by Muslims themselves. In particular, a woman and a potential groom must meet and become acquainted before the wedding (preferably in the presence of a relative of the bride), and their decision to become a

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<sup>28</sup> See numbers 2–4 of 1991, in particular.



family must be exclusively voluntary. Parents reserve the right to advise, but without any intervention [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 18–88]. MS MYu, in detailed reference to religious tradition, clarifies terms of marriage (e.g., the size of the *mahr* payment), criticizes superfluity at weddings, the rude interference of relatives in the lives of young spouses, and other such difficulties [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 90–121].

At the same time, MS MYu sharply criticizes the humiliation of young daughters-in-law and claims in relation to them from young husbands and relatives (a rather frequent phenomenon in modern Uzbek families). In this context, *Happy Family* provides detailed clarification (based on the Qur'an and Hadith, in particular) of a husband's duties in the family and the principles of mutual relationships of relatives with the newly married and of the bride and groom with each other. MS MYu supposes that one must not prohibit the woman from leaving home and limit her social ties. However, she must only leave after consultation with her husband or asking his permission and remembering her obligations as a mother and a wife [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 122–150].

Insisting that men, because of their physiological particularities, must dominate in the family (and the woman must be subordinate to him), the author calls on men to be milder and to treat their wives with understanding, stating a number of Alcoranic quotations and Hadith prescribing the peaceful resolution of any conflicts in the family [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 300–409].

In this respect, most interesting is MS MYu's interpretation of the 34<sup>th</sup> *ayat* of an-Nisa' Sunni of the Qur'an (Women). The *ayat* states, "Husbands stand above wives as Allah gave ones preference over the others ... and those [wives], whose recalcitrance scares you, entreat and leave them on [marriage] beds and strike them. And if they blame themselves, do not look for ways against them...."<sup>29</sup> The Tajik researcher L. Dodkhudoeva remarked, "For those who do not follow Islam, this *ayat* is the brightest evidence of Islam's inhumanity as it opens the way to the recognized domestic violence, cruelty towards the human being knowingly much weaker" [Dodkhudoeva 2013: 260]. Nevertheless, MS MYu insists that "strike" in the *ayat* should not be understood as beating or maiming. To confirm this, he provides a number of Hadith verses that prescribe not scolding wives, not striking them in the face, and not using violence towards concubines. MS MYu draws particular attention to the Hadith, giving the example of the Prophet who permitted himself only to jab his excited wife with a finger or to prick her slightly with his toothpick. MS MYu writes that, in her nature, the woman is susceptible, passionate, and fussy. The man must keep this in mind and not gripe to extremes. Following the Prophet's example, he must not escalate the situation to assault and battery. In this case, MS MYu is sure the conflict can be resolved without scandal. At the same time, he appeals to women's reasonability, calling on them to attempt to keep quiet and acknowledge men's natural superiority [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 415–424].

Nevertheless, my observations show that not all theologians and *imams* share such a delicate approach to interpretation of this *ayat*. My anecdotal data shows 45–50% of *imams* in Uzbekistan suppose that the *ayat*'s prescription on wives' bodily punishment should be treated as more preferable, even within the availability of the Hadith, as their status "canceling/*Mansukh*" instructions of the Qur'an is not proven.

MS MYu's address on spouses' intimate life (for the first time in his publications) should be considered unexpected for modern theological tradition in Central Asia, because many of the region's modern theologies preferred to avoid these topics in publications, restricting them to private discussions with men. Traditionally, MS MYu sharply rejects abortions. He insists that the only appropriate form of

<sup>29</sup> Modern translators and interpreters of the Qur'an prefer to highlight the polysemy of the key word in the *ayat* "ضرب" (in the *ayat*, we have the imperative mood of the verb—"اضربو"), and it should be translated not as "strike" but as "go away, leave." In this translation, the *ayat* sounds quite different. For details, see the site of *Islamic Perspectives* (<http://www.Islamicperspectives.com/Qoran-4-34.htm>). See also [Ibrahim 2007: 13].

termination of pregnancy for Muslims is the abruption of the sexual intercourse. The author speaks about permissible and disapproved forms (positions) of sexual contact, opportunities of artificial impregnation, but only by extracted sperm of the lawful husband, and so on. In the style he has established, MS MYu finds confirmations for his instructions in consecrated texts [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 153–154, 230–237, 435–441]. Addressing spouses' intimate life "according to the Sunni" in the public environment is in itself revolutionary for Central Asia, and, according to my observations, it was perceived positively by numerous MS MYu readers. He insists that topics should not be banned from public discussion in Islam, even such delicate issues.

The entire series of MS MYu's publications is devoted to a review of prescriptions in "bookish Islam," related to norms of family relations and problems with them; in essence, the series is aimed at careful, but insistent recoding of the "women's issue," and at a complete revision of the results of Soviet modernization. At the same time, MS MYu did not separate himself from reality; instead, he tried to harmonize his style of writing, his clarification of theological issues, and even his vocabulary with the peculiar perception of his target audience, which was, and, to a great extent remains, the product of Soviet educational and cultural codes.

Nevertheless, in his writings, MS MYu diligently evaded three issues that, in his opinion, are key in global Islamic discourse. One is connected to the usual claims addressed to Islam—the issue of polygamy. During my interview with MS MYu (November, 2005), I tried to clarify why he avoided this issue and how he interpreted polygamy in Islam. He answered that having one wife is preferable in Islam. If relations are built with her correctly, "following true prescriptions of Shari'ah," then the need for another wife or concubine falls away. He accounted for his silence on this issue, first, by the fact that he wrote for a modern audience (first and foremost, for women) and considered changes in his readers' minds and perceptions. On the other hand, he did not want to provide Islam's opponents with a "new motive for attacks" since polygamy is one argument in criticism of Islam. At the same time, critics are mostly amateurs, both in the historical context of polygamy's emergence in Islam and in other mostly disputable issues of Shari'ah prescriptions. Following tradition, MS MYu criticized Western communities and other religions in which men, as a rule, have lovers and other forms of adulterous relations, and in which non-traditional sexual relations have become quite common.

The second issue is that in publications and public speeches, MS MYu completely ignored fixed and enforced state legislation, norms of family law, the rights of women, parents' duties, and other similar issues. In essence, women, like the whole family in Uzbekistan (and in the region's neighboring states), have come under the enforcement of two legal systems.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, legally fixed and enforced family law is secular in form and origin. On the other hand, a massive call (apparently supported by the state) to follow Shari'ah prescriptions in family relations, including relations of women and distribution of inheritance, also exists.

I also raised these issues during the interview with MS MYu. His answer was within the framework of the current situation. He stated that, in fact, secular law was formed on the basis of moral and ethical prescriptions of religious law (including Islamic law). That is why he does not see contradictions between religious prescriptions and legislation. Moreover, the law is more effective in the regulation of family relations and the status of men and women because it is based on the prescriptions of Allah and his Prophet.

And, one more disputable issue within the framework of the global Islamic discourse is that MS MYu also avoided *hijab* wearing by women in his statements and publications. In private conversations,

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<sup>30</sup> Another tradition was chosen in the legislative systems of other Muslim countries, e.g., in Egypt, under availability of secular (French) forms of criminal or civil law, regulation of family law is based on laws of the Shafi'iyah. See [Agrama 2010].



he said that according to Sunni, *hijab* wearing is the eternal prescription. Frankly speaking, he does not adhere to the return to “blank” forms of *hijab* (similar to *purdah*) and admits its form looks like a kerchief tied on the neck.

Nevertheless, he obviously offers and interprets religious prescriptions as apparent alternatives to “circular legislation” that he supposes ineffective as it was “thought out” by human beings and therefore “cannot comply with prescriptions of Allah and his Prophet.”

## ■ “Give the Floor to Women!” Muslim Women of the New Generation and Their Publications

MS MYu’s approaches have found and continue to find their successors. Even his latent opponents use (often imperceptibly to him) argumentation (adapted, of course) borrowed from his works.<sup>31</sup> His approaches and interpretation techniques have been captured by the female intellectuals who studied at the female madrasa named after Khadichai Kubro, at female departments of the Tashkent Islamic Institute, and by graduates from the Tashkent Islamic University (all three located in Tashkent). This is particularly notable in publications in the newspaper and journal of the Muslim Department (*Islom Nuri*, *Khidoyat Sari/Khidoyat*, published since 1996 and 1999, respectively). Female graduates from these institutions often publish different articles, short literary essays, or verses on the pages of these publications. The *Khidoyat* journal has a special rubric, “*Ayollar Sakhifasi*” or “Page for Women.”

Since 2006, this has become a regular page; on it, girls and women publish articles referring to norms of family and public ethics that, in their opinion, a Muslim woman must observe: from issues of children’s upbringing to the call to learn the history of Islamic law. A particular place in these women’s publications is occupied by the retelling and ethical interpretation of the old myths concerned with the lives of the Prophet’s wives, his associates, and of women who became famous in the Islamic history as exemplars of religious dedication, the love of their families, who may do with very little, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

Sometimes, articles dealing with male duties in the family and norms of their attitudes towards women appear in journals. Such articles usually bring forward Hadith like “The best [Muslims] of you are those who treat their wives well.” Their authors rather sharply criticize open dictatorship by men in families (particularly young ones) [Idrisali qizi 2012: 22]. The impact of the argumentation in MS MYu publications is particularly notable in such articles.

The whole series of articles by women authors (madrasa graduates) is dedicated to criticism of extravagance during weddings and other celebrations or mournful rituals held in connection with the remembrance of dead parents or relatives. This criticism completely coincides with that in SADUM’s documents, as well as with the theologians of today’s Muslim Department of Uzbekistan.

Those who consider themselves Muslims extremely rarely (if not almost never) discuss issues of female dress code. In particular, I mean the recently actively discussed *hijab* issue. The authorities have not approved the wearing of the *hijab* at state bodies, although this issue was not discussed openly in printed publications of the Muslim Department of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

I succeeded in finding only one article of this type, published by Mukhatrama Ulughova. The article has a promising title: “Clothes Measure Spirituality” [Ulughova 2013]. The author extremely disapproves of the excessive commitment to the “Arabic forms” of black clothes, with thickly veiled faces. As

<sup>31</sup> In its turn, works of MS MYu himself were also written under strong influence of theologians of the Arab world, often as direct borrowings.

<sup>32</sup> For example, *Hidoyat*, Nos. 2, 3, 2009; Nos. 1–2, 4, 9, 2010 and others.

M. Ulughova writes, such clothes are completely inappropriate for the Uzbek women, particularly at weddings. She supposes that while choosing clothes, Muslim women must attach preference to national traditions implying the female attire of local people, but not the *hijab* that this author considers to symbolize "the worst times for women."

The author does not write a word about *hijab*, probably supposing from its form that wearing the *hijab* does not in itself require discussion. However, at the time of publication (2013), the problem of wearing the *hijab* at state bodies, particularly at the educational institutions (in the form of internal circulars and orders) has not been practically raised. Sometimes, this issue has led to local conflicts. Interestingly, the Muslim Department kept to a specific position, implying that *hijab* wearing is a personal and voluntary choice. Its prohibition would have meant provision of additional argument in favor of those criticizing Uzbekistan's religious policy.

Obviously, theologians' argumentation and women's own choices forced some governmental authorities to revise their attitudes on this issue. As a result, during the last two years, state officials have become more tolerant toward those who prefer to wear *hijab* (or even more often, national kerchiefs—*ro'mol*), including at educational institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, post-Soviet phobia and views on forms of "women's freedom," their dress code, and role in social and cultural life are gradually changing. On the other hand, it is often necessary to speak about intolerance to women who prefer "to return to the sources" and defiantly position themselves as women who strictly follow religious prescriptions. They do not entirely approve of those who are "open," i.e., who do not wear *hijab*, preferring instead European fashion, although even "open women" still wear *hijab* at ritual sites (e.g., *Mavlud* and pilgrimage to the graves of saints).

Special marks of modernity imply that significant numbers of women are attempting to select forms and limits of their emancipation by themselves, perceiving and understanding religious prescriptions differently, deciding in a different way what to wear and whether to make the *hijab*. All have become accustomed to such diversity by understanding that mutual tolerance toward the look of the "other" is an integral sign of the day.

At the least, the continuing process of "female re-Islamization" often turns out to be as painful as the introduction of the Soviet forms of modernization, the influence of which is not contested by anybody.

## ■ CONCLUSION

It is hardly possible to assert that general definitions of "modernity" and "traditionality," including their use in characterizing the societies of Soviet Central Asia, have not been fully comprehended. Yet in Soviet ethnography, different definitions were applied to societies of the socialist republics of Central Asia, constantly emphasizing the adherence of local residents to the "community modes" and "traditionalism" consistently preserved during the "socialist experiment," acquiring heterogeneous forms.<sup>34</sup>

In any case, for Muslim communities, the most exemplary indicator of both forms of "modernity" and "traditionalism" (under ambiguous interpretations of these definitions<sup>35</sup>) was and still is the "women's issue." The limits of perception and understanding of religious prescriptions by both women themselves and the un-unified (changing depending on ideological conjunctures) opinions of theologians retained

<sup>33</sup> I mainly judge by the situation at Tashkent Islamic University, where I teach from time to time.

<sup>34</sup> Sergei Abashin offered a short bibliographical review and criticism of various theories, approaches, and markers of Soviet ethnology (ethnography) in his magnificent monograph [Abashin 2015: 13–22].

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance [Tipps 1973; Hobsbawm 1983; Eisenstadt 2002].

principally unchanged configurations. Women understood and fulfilled religious prescriptions in their own ways, and their views did not and still do not agree with those norms (particularly related to family rituals) that local theologians declare “the only correct ones.” It is hardly sensible to reject the serious influence of grand-sized Soviet projects (especially educational or those connected with “national construction”) on local communities, including women. Of course, Soviet forms of ideology to a great extent borrowed clichés of the European revolutions and reformations. A particular place among them was attached to the issue of women’s equality. Bolshevik power preferred to solve this issue, as usual, in a nihilistic and maximalistic style. But force has not always been the single source and synopsis of promotion of Soviet forms of emancipation of Muslim women [Kamp 2006: 120–125; Babadjanov 2014: 260].

Within the Muslim environment of the former Russian Empire, discussion of the “women’s issue” began well before the Bolsheviks took power and was initiated by the religious reformers (*Jadids*). Evidently, *Jadids* appeared to be under the influence of the Egyptian reformers like Qassim Amin, whose ideas turned out to be realistic even in the Soviet times.

Theologies adherent to *mazhaba* (conventionally “conservative”) prescriptions that did not adopt reformers’ ideas could not pass over this problem in silence. Nevertheless, conservatives first extremely disfavored the authorities’ reforms, although they gradually relinquished their positions and looked for compromises and adaptations. There are no doubts that external criticism (first and foremost, atheistic) induced Soviet theologians to revise the “women’s issue”, to look for and present arguments prescribing, indeed, a mild attitude toward women in the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

SADUM revealed a magical loyalty to the authorities and a readiness to cooperate with them.<sup>36</sup> They have undertaken functions of mediators in some reforms of Soviet power, first and foremost in the issue of women’s emancipation. However, SADUM managed to defend its own understanding of the forms and types of women’s emancipation.

Simultaneously, SADUM took part in the movement for women’s emancipation in the context of latent opposition by theologians and activists of various atheistic societies—direct successors of the *Hujum* movement. In other words, theologians tried to reduce atheistic movements’ aggressiveness by offering scripts of emancipation considering, from their viewpoint, ethical norms and forms of identity connected with the usual religious minimalism.

Moreover, during the Soviet times, Islam as part of identity was not forgotten. Thus, religion could not be finally pushed from the public to the private area; this was fixed, together with the establishment of SADUM. After issuing a number of sponsored *fatwas* that declared non-obligatory wearing of *hijab*, SADUM was excluded from discussion of the “women’s issue” because theologians’ understanding of emancipation forms during the Soviet era did not coincide with the vector of the official ideology.

Nevertheless, as seen in Shakirov’s articles, despite the taboo, the Soviet theologians strived to defend their viewpoint on the prescriptions of the Qur’an and Hadith regarding the familial and social status of women, their interrelations with men, the resolution of family conflicts, and the attempt to separate women’s lack of rights before the revolution from their own religious prescriptions.

At the end of Perestroika, we saw massive rehabilitation of the Islamic norms regarding women. However, the process was also undifferentiated. As it has been shown, there were theologians committed to radical changes, including those within the SADUM that had changed not only its signboard (“Muslim Department of Mavara’an-nahr/Uzbekistan”) but also its working style. Since then, the theologians

<sup>36</sup> See the short review offered by Seyfettin Ersahin [Ersahin 2005].



have tried to compensate for the losses of their positions in the course of social and cultural revolutions and the ideological recoding of the most of the population. They began revising the Soviet past, which implied an attempt to reject the results of Soviet modernization.

Abolishing limitations in religion coincided with the crisis of the official ideology. Theologians of various perspectives first tried to exploit this circumstance, i.e. the disappointment of the majority of the people. Despite the internal split, all the theologians (especially those of the new generation) tried to present the illusive picture of the prosperity of the Muslim world guided by Shari'ah. Nevertheless, the real morality crisis of the religious prescriptions and the actually downgraded position of women at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which coincided with the "socialist experiment," were forgotten or completely ignored. As L. Dodkhudoeva successfully noted, "endless (handwritten) sources are full of examples of the far from cloudless existence of the community in the middle of the century" [Dodkhudoeva 2013: 78-79].<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of independence, there was one more attempt to return Shari'ah into the general area of the ideological discourse and into "women's modernization" in particular. Again, some theologians presented Shari'ah as a unique code of norms and rules guaranteeing stability, prosperity, the revival of family morality and social ethics, and collective religious memory.

As a result, the family law (e.g., the status of women and their family rights) became one of those rare legitimate spaces where Shari'ah prescriptions can act as an alternative and, simultaneously, as an addition to official family legislation.<sup>38</sup> However, limits and spaces of eligibility of Shari'ah prescriptions in various families differ and depend on a multiplicity of circumstances, including the degree of "modernization" of an individual family, their conflicts, and so on.

MS MYu became the most productive (from the viewpoint of publications) theologian of the last years of Perestroika and the epoch of independence. He tried to make the full use of fruits of the crisis of Soviet ideology and the beginning of the actual re-Islamization of the society. A solid foundation of published books and articles allowed him to claim presentation of the truth to the last degree. These claims for the final and only correct resolution of public discussion on the "women's issue" are, first and foremost, connected with the attempts to return women from Soviet emancipation and modernization to conventionally "traditional" norms of life and ethics adapted into contemporary forms.

MS MYu suggested a new form of Shari'ah actualization, including through the "women's issue." He presented Shari'ah as the only legitimate and reliable source of moral and ethnic forms in family life, trying to restore this complex synthesis of normative prescriptions into community life and family, in particular. However, he tried not to lose his sense of proportion and did not mention a return to medieval reality, although he mentioned several times about violations of these prescriptions by Muslims themselves, long before the establishment of the Soviet power. At the same time, he did not deny the possibility of the contemporary Muslim woman socializing in public, but in the context of man's domination and with his permission.

Actually resorting to *ijtihad*, MS MYu claimed the presentation of "renewed Islam." However, in reality, his argumentation resembles the emanation of contexts and prescriptions of previous epochs' scholastic texts, formally appealing to modern (actual) Islamic discourses.

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<sup>37</sup> My personal experience of investigations, e.g., of the Kokand khanate, also lead me to the conclusion that Shari'ah prescriptions (as norms of social and personal ethics, or in the area of women's rights) were not regularly followed. See [Babadzhanov 2010: 367–420].

<sup>38</sup> E.g., *imams* of quarter (*mahalla*) mosques are involved with conflict management and actively apply this right to promote Islamic norms in family life, women's status, etc.

While analyzing the “women’s issue” from the viewpoint of Shari‘ah prescriptions, MS MYu attempted to prove the humanistic mission of the Islam in which rights and duties of women are concerned with sacred prescriptions superior to all forms of legislation conceptualized by human beings. Probably because of this, MS MYu ignores the legislative and constitutional rights and guarantees of citizens in his works “as something formal and, apparently, illegitimate from the point of view of religious prescriptions.”<sup>39</sup> At the same time, he actively quotes (in the form of annexes to sections of *Happy Family*) documents of the Islamic Council of Europe, the General Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (VIDPCh), and the Constitution of the Islamic State (adopted in Paris on December 10, 1983). Even in divorce conditions (*talaq*), he completely ignored existing legislation and insisted that problems in that situation should be solved by following Shari‘ah prescriptions [Muhammad-Yusuf 2011: 187-189, 245-247, 309-311].

Women of the new generation in Uzbekistan (and throughout the region at large) are not uniform, although none of them denies the religious component of identity. To begin with, their exterior (or dress code) can be conventionally divided into three types: (1) preferring “European attire” and not wearing the *hijab* (mainly residents of large cities); (2) preferring “national” forms of clothing and wearing kerchiefs (*ro‘mol*) and national dresses, but not accepting the “Arabic” types of *hijab* and clothing (mainly residents of districts, villages, and old parts of cities; these seem to form the majority); and (3) finally, preferring forms of *hijab* and dress that have spread in the modern Arabic world (the “Arabic dress code”).

But irrespective of dress code, degree, and their form of commitment to Shari‘ah prescriptions, women desire to be not only the object but also the subject of changes; they themselves attempt to identify forms and limits of their emancipation, e.g., by discussing these issues in published articles and Internet space.

The authorities’ official position on Islamization of the “women’s issue” is rather unstable, but cautious. The state’s critical attitude toward Soviet modernization does not in any way indicate a full refusal of its results and heritage. Despite criticism of the Soviet project of overcoming gender inequality (in the sense of de facto limitations on women’s rights), it was successful to a certain extent. Its results within the framework of Soviet ideology are not only argued in contemporary Uzbekistan (as they are in the region’s neighboring countries), but are actively supported. Women’s involvement in the country’s social, political, and scientific life is still stimulated, and this introduces corrections into the real position of women in society.

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<sup>39</sup> Such a position complicated his relations with official authorities, as MS MYu did not fit into the corps of *ulemas* and *imams* cooperating with the state although nobody challenged his authority. Simultaneously, his refusal to accept terrorism made him the natural ally of Uzbekistan and many CIS countries.

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