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THE GLOBAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MODERNIZATION AND INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

The history of feminism in the USSR is marked by a paradox: while the Soviet state officially championed gender equality, women's roles were largely confined to traditional domains like motherhood and domestic labor, all under the guise of political rhetoric about liberation. Independent feminist movements were discouraged, as the state claimed to have resolved gender issues. This fostered a culture of sexism that persisted into the post-Soviet era, where feminist discourse remains marginalized, particularly in Kazakhstan and other former Soviet countries. Globally, the conversation about women's roles in modernizing and interpreting Islam gained momentum in the 1990s, especially in Muslim-majority nations such as Turkey, Malaysia, Iran, and the United States. However, this movement largely bypassed Muslim women in post-Soviet states. Muslim feminism emerged as a response to modernization, striving to reinterpret religious teachings in line with contemporary ideals of equality and democracy. Feminists highlight that the Quran does not prohibit women from praying during menstruation, becoming imams, or leading prayers, and they reject interpretations that justify violence against women. In Kazakhstan and other former Soviet Muslim nations, however, these feminist reinterpretations have had limited influence. Many see feminism as outdated or irrelevant, viewing it as a competition between men and women that has already been "won" by women. Furthermore, the socialist past, which suppressed religious discussions, has stunted conversations about the intersection of Islam and feminism. As global movements push for a rethinking of women's roles, women in Kazakhstan often gravitate toward more traditional interpretations of Islam, leaving the country on the periphery of these broader feminist developments. This highlights the pressing need for open, inclusive dialogue on gender issues, which remains critically underdeveloped in these contexts.

Key words: Muslim Women of Kazakhstan, Global Role of Women, Gender Equality, Islam in Post-Soviet Countries, Modernization, Interpretation of Islam.

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Исламды жаңғырту мен түсіндіруде әйелдердің жаһандық рөлі

Аңдатпа. КСРО-дағы феминизм тарихы парадоксқа толы: кеңес мемлекеті ресми түрде гендерлік теңдікті жақтағанымен, әйелдердің рөлі негізінен ана болу және үй шаруашылығы сияқты дәстүрлі салалармен шектелді, бұл «азат ету» туралы саяси риторикамен бүркемеленген еді. Тәуелсіз феминистік қозғалыстарға тыйым салынды, өйткені мемлекет гендерлік мәселелердің шешілгенін мәлімдеді. Бұл сексизм мәдениетінің қалыптасуына әкеліп соқты, ол посткеңестік дәуірге дейін сақталып, феминистік дискурс, әсіресе Қазақстан мен басқа да посткеңестік елдерде, маргиналданған күйде қалды. Жалпы әлемде 1990 жылдары әйелдердің исламды жаңғырту және түсіндірудегі рөлі туралы пікірталастар Түркия, Малайзия, Иран және Америка Құрама Штаттары сияқты мұсылман көпшілік мемлекеттерде кеңінен өріс алды. Алайда бұл қозғалыс посткеңестік елдердегі мұсылман әйелдерді айналып өтті. Мұсылман феминизмі модернизацияға жауап ретінде пайда болып, діни ілімдерді қазіргі заманғы теңдік

пен демократия идеалдарына сай түсіндіруге ұмтылды. Феминисттер Құранның әйелдерге етеккір кезінде намаз оқуға, имам болуға немесе намазды басқаруға тыйым салмайтынын және әйелдерге қатысты зорлық-зомбылықты ақтайтын түсіндірмелерді жоққа шығаратынын атап көрсетеді. Алайда Қазақстан мен басқа да посткеңестік мұсылман елдерінде бұл феминистік қайта түсіндірулер аз әсер етті. Көптеген адамдар феминизмді ескірген немесе маңызын жоғалтқан құбылыс деп санап, оны ерлер мен әйелдер арасындағы «жарыс» деп түсінеді, мұнда әйелдер әлдеқашан «жеңіске жетті». Сонымен қатар, социалистік өткен тарих, ол діни пікірталастарды басып тастаған, ислам мен феминизмнің тоғысқан жеріндегі талқылаулардың дамуын тежеуде. Жаһандық қозғалыстар әйелдердің рөлін қайта қарауды талап етіп жатқанда, Қазақстандағы әйелдер көбіне исламның дәстүрлі түсіндірмелеріне бейімделіп, елді бұл кең ауқымды феминистік үрдістердің шетінде қалдырады. Бұл осы контексттерде гендерлік мәселелер бойынша ашық және инклюзивті диалогтың дамуының аса қажет екенін көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан мұсылман әйелдері, әйелдердің жаһандық рөлі, гендерлік теңдік, посткеңестік елдердегі ислам, исламды жаңғырту және түсіндіру.

Глобальная роль женщин в равноправной интерпретации мусульманской культуры

Аннотация. История феминизма в СССР отмечена парадоксом: хотя советское государство официально провозглашало равенство полов, роли женщин были в значительной степени ограничены традиционными сферами, такими как материнство и домашний труд, всё это прикрывалось политической риторикой о “освобождении”. Независимые феминистские движения подавлялись, поскольку государство утверждало, что вопрос гендерного равенства уже решён. Это способствовало формированию культуры сексизма, которая сохранялась в постсоветскую эпоху, где феминистский дискурс остаётся маргинализированным, особенно в Казахстане и других странах бывшего СССР. На глобальном уровне обсуждение роли женщин в модернизации и интерпретации ислама набрало обороты в 1990-х годах, особенно в странах с мусульманским большинством, таких как Турция, Малайзия, Иран и Соединённые Штаты. Однако это движение в значительной мере обошло стороной мусульманок в постсоветских государствах. Мусульманский феминизм возник как ответ на модернизацию, стремясь переосмыслить религиозные учения в соответствии с современными идеалами равенства и демократии. Феминистки подчёркивают, что Коран не запрещает женщинам молиться во время менструации, становиться имамами или вести молитвы, и отвергают интерпретации, оправдывающие насилие в отношении женщин. Однако в Казахстане и других постсоветских мусульманских странах эти феминистские переосмысления оказали ограниченное влияние. Многие воспринимают феминизм как устаревший или неактуальный, считая его соревнованием между мужчинами и женщинами, в котором женщины уже “победили”. Кроме того, социалистическое прошлое, подавлявшее религиозные дискуссии, затормозило обсуждения на стыке ислама и феминизма. В то время как глобальные движения призывают к переосмыслению роли женщин, женщины в Казахстане часто склоняются к более традиционным интерпретациям ислама, оставляя страну на периферии этих более широких феминистских процессов. Это подчёркивает насущную необходимость открытого и инклюзивного диалога по вопросам гендера, который остаётся критически неразвитым в этих контекстах.

Ключевые слова: мусульманки Казахстана, глобальная роль женщин, гендерное равенство, ислам в постсоветских странах, модернизация и интерпретация ислама.

Introduction

Feminism is not merely a movement aimed at liberating women from a male-dominated system, as it is often perceived in various segments of society. Rather, feminism envisions profound changes in social life, seeking to free both women and men from the burdens of a competitive system while promoting a new lifestyle at both individual and societal levels. It is widely understood that men, who tend to live an average of ten years less than women, often neglect their emotional and physical health. They suffer from significantly higher rates of risky behaviors, alcohol, and substance abuse, making them victims of the patriarchal system just as much as women are.

In post-Soviet countries, feminism is frequently viewed, similar to its perception in Turkey, as a form of male antagonism imported from the West. A century ago, Nimet Cemil from the Ottoman women’s movement observed that terms like “telegraph”, “automobile”, and “ferry” were also Western inventions, thus she opted to use the term “feminism” as it was. However, today’s Islamic feminists, akin to female activ-

ists from the USSR and former Soviet states, often tend to avoid this term. According to historian Pushkareva, all Western terms, except for feminism, have smoothly integrated into the Russian language. Similarly, the lack of diversity in interpreting both Islam and feminism in post-Soviet countries has hindered the development of Islamic feminism and the discourse on gender equality.

Methodology

This article employs qualitative analysis methods to study contemporary trends in Islamic feminism. The research data were collected through a sociological survey using semi-structured interviews. A total of twenty-one women from Kazakhstan were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of Islamic feminism in Turkey.

Additionally, the following methods were used for analysis: The works, public speeches, and videos of feminists and activists were examined. The analysis focuses on approaches to gender equality issues and solutions to women's problems within Muslim society.

This article is part of the dissertation work of Saule Yusupova, defended in 2021 at Gazi University, Ankara. The use of these methods allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the topic, highlighting both universal and specific aspects of feminism, including Islamic feminism and the activism of Muslim women.

The Impact of Sovietization on Muslim Women

Under the Soviet government's "Eastern Women" project, policies aimed at liberating women presumed that all women formed a homogenous group and experienced oppression in the same way. For example, Uzbek and Tajik women wore the veil, while Kyrgyz and Kazakh women did not. However, despite this difference, Kyrgyz and Kazakh women were subjected to the same anti-veil policies. This project extended to women in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Adyghe Republic, Karachay-Cherkessia, Chechen Republic, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Karakalpakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, as well as the Kalmyk, Buryat, and Sakha (Yakutia) Republics. Shurko [1] noted that the entire region was unified under the term "Soviet East," disregarding the varying religious and cultural statuses of women, whether Christian, Buddhist, Shamanist, or Muslim.

Even among Uzbek and Kyrgyz women in Central Asia, differences existed. It is evident that the "liberation" and "rescue" projects implemented for Eastern women affected Muslim women differently than their Slavic counterparts. The so-called "Women's Question", which the communist regime claimed to have resolved, had varying impacts on Muslim and Slavic women, imposing new forms of pressure on Muslim women. Although the Soviet approach to women's issues made some progress in the public sphere under the framework of socialist paternalism, the overall liberation of Soviet women remained incomplete.

The Soviet regime trained Muslim women – Tatar, Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Chechen, and Tajik – and organized labor laws to enable their participation in the workforce. Free education was provided universally, with compulsory eight-year education up to high school. However, Mitra Raheb [2] argued that seventy years of Sovietization were insufficient to dismantle the patriarchal structures within Muslim societies.

During the Soviet era, women primarily held secondary roles in the health and education sectors, although some also worked in physically demanding jobs. Even today, in post-Soviet countries, it is not uncommon to see women operating heavy machinery, driving tractors, or working as tram drivers. Social pressure was significant for those not engaged in public work; those who did not work were labeled as "tuniadets" (lazy, parasitic). Women were expected to contribute to the household income by performing the same tasks as men outside the home, but household chores and childcare remained their responsibility. The kitchen was traditionally seen as a woman's domain, and men only entered it to eat. Women were granted up to three years of maternity leave, yet they were also expected to return to work by placing their children in state childcare facilities. Overall, the mother was seen as

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responsible for her children's homework and development, while the role of fathers was minimized, as men were expected to focus on being productive Communist Party members.

In the early days of Soviet rule, Muslim communities resisted for up to ten years. Despite their strong opposition to women working with uncovered heads, they reluctantly complied with the laws they were obligated to follow. Women who went to work were perceived as agents of the secular government and were often blamed for collaborating. Men, feeling they had lost control over their wives' and daughters' attire, imposed additional pressures on women. As a result, Soviet Muslim women were forced to appear content with being secular in public while showing satisfaction with the patriarchal order at home. Those who rejected this duality were harshly punished as traitors to their traditions and ancestral religion [3].

Karakeeva's research in 1925 highlights [1] that although the Soviet government banned bride prices in 1921 and set the minimum marriage age at sixteen for women and eighteen for men, child brides in exchange for bride prices remained common, even among Communist Party members. For example, in the 1926 census of Kyrgyzstan, 29.2% of girls aged fifteen and 60% of girls aged sixteen were already married. This underscores the difficult position of Central Asian women caught between state laws and local customs.

Thus, although Soviet women were given dual responsibilities, Muslim women bore an additional burden. While Slavic women faced the "double burden", they were not tasked with the transmission of forbidden ethnic and religious traditions from generation to generation. Muslim women, as mothers, were pressured to take on the responsibility of instilling national values and preserving cultural identity in future generations. Women were seen as central figures in the construction of ethnic identities among new generations familiar with their religion and language. Efforts by the atheist government to eradicate Islamic traditions, equating Muslim culture with the Islamic religion, targeted both pre-Islamic beliefs (such as Tengriism and Shamanism) and Islamic customs, further increasing the burden on Muslim women [3].

Since there were no mechanisms during the Soviet era to preserve the languages and cultures of Muslim communities, Muslim women were expected to carry out this responsibility covertly. Slavic women did not face the same pressures. As Mitra Raheb [2] pointed out, "Muslim women from Central Asia and Azerbaijan found themselves in a new world of conflicting demands, facing both political and social pressures". For example, a Kazakh woman was required to be a "Soviet woman" according to Soviet law, while her first identity was expected to be a "Kazakh woman" according to Kazakh social law. Non-Muslim women did not experience a conflict between their cultural surroundings and the regime because the regime itself was "Slavic". Muslim women, however, had to answer to their families, the regime, and society. Families enforcing social laws viewed collaboration with the Soviet regime as betrayal, and thousands of Muslim women were killed for this reason. The regime, on the other hand, humiliated women who adhered to their social customs. For example, the Kazakh practice of reading the Quran and distributing "Jetinan" bread after funerals had to be conducted in secret. If discovered, those continuing such customs were accused of tribalism and labeled as reactionaries. In contrast, efforts to eliminate the Christian religion among Slavs did not extend to their everyday cultural practices because the Soviet government was itself Slavic. However, when it came to the Muslim population, religion and culture were intertwined, so both had to be eradicated. Harsh measures were taken against any religious or cultural inclinations [2].

Although many researchers acknowledge that Slavic women were also oppressed by the Soviet regime, the distinction between the responsibilities of Slavic and Muslim women remains significant, despite challenges to Raheb's conclusions.

The Absence of Feminism in Soviet Gender Policies: Liberation or Coercion?

In her article from September 2020, Russian activist Olga Kharitonova compares feminism to a tree. She describes the

"roots" as the worldviews of women from different periods in history, the "trunk" as a socio-political movement, and the "branches" as representing various ideologies and theories. Using this metaphor, Kharitonova explores whether feminism existed in the Soviet Union and, if so, what form it took [4]. In the USSR, where Marxist-Leninist ideology prevailed, "classical" feminism was deemed "bourgeois". The individualism central to feminist liberation was replaced by the collective struggle of women for the proletariat cause.

While the Bolsheviks granted women all civil rights and freedoms through decrees adopted in December 1917, legally equating women with men, they simultaneously shifted focus from individual women to the masses. As a result, the "woman question" was deprioritized, and women were primarily viewed through the lens of the working-class struggle rather than as individuals. In the Soviet version of feminism, the concept of "private life" disappeared, and the notion of the family as a unit that perpetuated social inequality and limited women's freedom was dismantled.

As Aivazova describes in her work Women in the Labyrinth of Equality, "Just one month after the October Revolution, Russian women were freed from all restrictions regarding children and property through the right to divorce. They gained the freedom to choose their profession, residence, and access to education, and they achieved wage parity with men. The first Soviet Constitution, adopted in July 1918, further strengthened the political and civil equality of men and women, and in 1920, women were granted the legal right to abortion" [4].

After World War II, Russia's birth rate remained at 3-4 children per woman [5]. Soviet women took on many heavy labor roles, such as road construction, paving, and driving tractors, while professions like hairdressing, nursing, and retail became largely feminized. It was also common to see women working as tram drivers.

Olga Isupova's research on motherhood in Russia shows a significant decline in birth rates – from an average of seven children per woman in the 18th century to five by 1890. After the October Revolution, abortion rates surged, particularly among educated women.

Despite its emphasis on liberation, the Soviet state struggled to control its increasingly independent female population. Complete gender equality conflicted with state goals, and by the late 1920s, the government shifted its approach. As industrialization and collectivization progressed, the regime relied heavily on women as a cheap labor force for its grand socialist projects.

The weakening of the family structure contributed to declining birth rates, which posed a demographic threat. In response, the state banned abortion in 1936 and reinforced the family as society's core unit. Soviet women were burdened with a dual role as both workers and mothers, a mandate that persisted throughout the regime [6].

Kharitonova's analogy of the "tree", as mentioned earlier, revealed that there was no "trunk" for the feminist movement in the USSR as a grassroots social and political force. This was because, in the Soviet Union, neither men nor women had the right to express political views. Apart from a few female party members like the feminist Kollontay, the absence of feminism in terms of ideology meant there were no "branches" of the feminist movement. Although it is said that feminism, as a social movement and ideology, did not exist in the USSR, an emancipatory consciousness managed to develop despite the pressure of communist ideology. Independent women's associations emerged in all former Soviet Republics, and feminism began to mature once again [4].

In the early 1980s, the first Russian feminists – Tatyana Goricheva, Yuliya Voznesenskaya, and Natalya Malakhovskaya – published articles about Soviet women's issues in the magazine Zhenshina i Rossia (Women and Russia). These feminists believed that the policies pursued under the name "Zhenski Vopros" (Women's Issues) after the October Revolution were unsuccessful and had not truly solved women's problems. They argued that Soviet women had been alienated from their "female nature" and had become beings more like men, emphasizing Christian piety. They also addressed many unseen problems, such as the challenges women faced in maternity hospitals. This was the first feminist movement in the USSR, which the

government considered dangerous and subsequently banned. Most of its members were arrested and exiled. Thus, in the 1980s, the Soviet Union viewed its first women's movement as a threat [7].

Although they raised issues from a feminist agenda, these Soviet feminists offered solutions that differed from those of Western feminist organizations. They opposed the idea of "equality" that demanded Soviet "superwomen" work both at home and in the workforce, rejecting the notion that brave men and feminine women belonged to the past [8]. Western feminists struggled to understand the concerns of these Soviet feminists who had been exiled from the USSR. Soviet feminists, who opposed women's forced participation in the workforce by referencing Christian religion and female nature, did not engage in feminist work in the Western countries where they lived. This was because the two feminist perspectives arose from different cultural and historical contexts. For example, during the second wave of feminism, U.S. feminists supported the idea that women should abandon their dreams of being housewives and join the workforce [19]. In contrast, Soviet Christian feminists' desire to remain at home was difficult to understand, as they criticized the fact that Soviet women could not stay at home. Additionally, in the 1970s, communist liberation and socialism experiments were seen as an ideal goal by some Western intellectuals, so these Soviet feminists, who "complained" about gender equality in the USSR, were not understood by Western communities [10].

At this point, Sandra Bem's 2004 comment comes to mind. Bem suggested that states and governments cannot significantly impact deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes in society over many generations [11].

In 2002, Larissa Upraviteleva studied statistics on Russian men and women. Comparing Soviet men and women, she did not believe in the liberation of Russian women according to Western concepts. She wrote that the discourse on gender equality in the post-Soviet world should differ from Western discourses. Based on her analysis of statistics, she stated that the women in this society had "won" in the competition with men and said the following: The average Russian man, compared to the Russian woman, is someone who lives worse, is uneducated, dehumanized, unemployed, aggressive, and dependent on alcohol and drugs, often starting his life in prison. In cases of divorce, it is generally the man who is removed from his children. Russian men live, on average, eleven years less than Russian women, yet they hold a patriarchal worldview. 73% of Russian men believe that a man should have power in the family and society. On the other hand, the educated Russian woman, employed in a female-dominated sector like social work, healthcare, teaching, or library services, is unable to escape financial dependence on men despite how hard she works. Thousands of educated, healthy, sensible, and beautiful women in Russia dream of marriage, starting traditional families, and raising children with their husbands. Once they marry and have children, these women carry not only the responsibilities of their families and children but also endure the burden of weak husbands – men who are abusive, irresponsible, and often alcoholics [12].

As an indicator of the significant losses suffered by men in the deeply entrenched patriarchal structure of the former Soviet Union, issues like men's alienation from their emotions and bodies, risky behavior due to competitive stress, and substance abuse became defining features of Soviet masculinity. Upravateleva's central argument is that Russian women are already so strong that they don't need Western feminism. She highlighted that feminism in Russia has often been perceived as merely a movement to support women or fuel competition between men and women. Instead of focusing on cultivating strong and independent Russian women, Upravateleva argues that attention should now be directed toward supporting Russian men.

This view reflects a broader perception of feminism across post-Soviet countries, where many believe that gender equality was already achieved under the USSR. The expression "Women have long surpassed men" is frequently used but often distorts the reality, diverting attention away from the true essence of feminism. After the 1990s, feminism became largely irrelevant or seen as outdated by many, yet feminism

is not about a competition between men and women; it is about liberating all members of society, including men, from patriarchal oppression.

While in the West, many men actively support feminism, in post-Soviet countries, even women often show little interest in the movement and fail to see its potential for societal transformation. The Soviet model of women's liberalization, unfortunately, fostered resistance to feminism, leading many to believe that equality had already been achieved. However, even in the 1970s, the patriarchal system and issues of gender equality in the USSR remained unresolved, despite communist rhetoric to the contrary.

In contemporary Kazakhstan, the progress of feminism and gender equality remains slow, with Islamic feminism, one strand of the movement, being virtually unknown to post-Soviet women from Muslim-majority countries. The lack of awareness and engagement with feminist ideas highlights the ongoing struggle for genuine gender equality in the region.

Women Typology in Svetlana Shakirova's Research

Svetlana Shakirova is a faculty member teaching gender studies at the Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Established in 1944, towards the end of World War II, this university was created solely for the education of women. During the Soviet era, it aimed to provide education for girls coming from rural areas and villages around Almaty. Even today, 80% of the students at this university are women, primarily in pedagogical fields. The university's homepage features a quote from Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's first president, who aimed to shape the Kazakh people by educating Kazakh women. He stated, "Educating a girl is equivalent to educating the entire nation." The 'Institute for Gender and Social Research,' founded in the 2000s within the university, is led by Shakirova.

Shakirova divides the history of Kazakhstan, which influences the shaping of women's identity, into three main periods: the feudal-nomadic period before 1917, the socialist industrial-agricultural Soviet period from 1917 to 1991, and the market economy transition period from 1991 to the present [13].

In her analysis, Shakirova categorizes Kazakh women post-USSR into three main groups: Traditional women, Soviet women, and Modern women. She describes traditional women as those who comply with absolute paternalism and male authority. In contrast, Soviet women, positioned between the traditional and modern groups, tend to seek a peaceful life while preserving their familial ties. Modern women, on the other hand, pursue partnership between men and women. Shakirova compares her research to that of women voters in the United States, identifying three main groups: Non-feminists (equivalent to traditional women in our research), potential feminists (Soviet women), and feminists (modern women). The political behaviors of these groups, especially regarding abortion, show significant differences. According to surveys conducted in 1992, the proportions of women's groups in the U.S. were as follows: Non-feminists 30%, potential feminists 40%, feminists 30%. It can be inferred that the proportions of traditional, Soviet, and modern women in Kazakhstan are likely similar.

In contemporary Kazakhstan, many people nostalgically remember the Soviet era, considering the phenomenon of the "Soviet woman" to have become an irreversible part of history. Biographical interviews were conducted with grandmothers and mothers who contributed to rebuilding the country after the war. Soviet working women worked under the most challenging conditions and demonstrated unique sacrifices for their country. The lives of these women coincide with what are considered the best years of the country's socialist history, and in the last twenty years of the life cycle, the collapse of socialism has been recorded with all its drama and pain during interviews. Through these discussions, Shakirova ensured that the feelings, experiences, and stories of the Soviet female generation would endure for future generations.

The Soviet women's group can also be considered a "moderate" transitional group between traditional and modern women. Shakirova attributes the placement of So-

viet women between traditional and modern women to what Deniz Kandiyoti describes as the 'Soviet paradox,' noting that these women were "neither modern nor exploited" [14]. While their participation in the workforce as educated professionals and their visibility might present them as modern, these women were simultaneously compelled by the Soviet system to take on household chores, childcare, and motherhood alone. Consequently, with the support of the Soviet system, they had no options like remaining single, as they were expected to undertake double duties throughout their lives. These women witnessed the communists' approach to women's issues, and now even the youngest among them is over fifty. Most of these women hold deep respect for traditions and Soviet values, never discussing sexuality, and, like today's traditional women, they condemn divorce and premarital sexuality. However, similar to the modern women's group, they also oppose polygamy, headscarves, and bride price, placing them between the two extreme groups of women [13].

The construction of the Soviet woman was accomplished through literature, art, media, cinema, and painting, similar to the multifaceted model of a woman in post-Republic Turkey, presented as a non-traditional, secular, strong, productive figure managing the family.

From the biographies collected through interviews, it is clear that this group of women often grew up in families where the father was deceased, facing difficult life conditions. According to Soviet woman's ideology, the mother's role in the family within modern society is quite significant; it is understood that women suffer from inequality in the distribution of household burdens since the economic weight of the family rests on their shoulders. There is almost no sign of these women maintaining ethnic or religious traditions in daily life. It has been observed that the primary goal in these women's lives is to raise their children. Shakirova [13] asserts that the independence of Soviet women encompasses not only economic independence but also psychological independence. Additionally, Soviet women face psychological pressure at work, sometimes physical violence at home, and continue to commute to work despite the fear of sexual abuse they might encounter in public.

Another group of women frequently mentioned by Shakirova is the traditional women's group. These women come from father-dominated families, and in many cases, their mothers are unhappy in their personal lives because they have dedicated themselves to serving their husbands and children. They fail to recognize their potential beyond being a mother and wife and, at least within their city or village, cannot become significant social or political figures. Since there is very little sexual interaction between mother and father, daughters (traditional women) do not receive the necessary sexual education in their families. They suppress their sexuality by shaming youthful emotional experiences. Women in this group prioritize establishing a family first. Their pursuit of a spouse, typically aimed at creating a sacred family, often results in marrying the first man they encounter. This group of women values virginity highly, perceives an inexperienced woman in sexual relations as chaste, and views bride kidnapping as a commonplace way to marry. Moreover, they are utterly opposed to divorce, premarital sexual relations, and having children outside of marriage. While a traditional woman may wish to have many children, the decision is generally made by her mother-in-law or husband, and under these circumstances, she evaluates herself as a happy mother and wife. Her personal spending is negligible, and if she earns income, she considers it family money. She sees family harmony, prosperity, and happiness as her primary concerns. If she works, she is often dissatisfied with her job and performs at a mediocre level. The relatives in her trusted circle are her family. These women perceive stability in Soviet life, guaranteed employment, free education and healthcare, social security, and state support for families as a unified strength, longing for the Soviet Union because the party played a significant role in shaping a good life, guaranteed future, and peaceful old age. According to the traditional woman, women in society are at a lower level compared to men, but their roles within the family are elevated. There-

fore, it is believed that working outside the home does not bring much satisfaction and happiness, as the family remains the place where they are most appreciated. Divorce and extramarital relationships are taboo and considered moral issues tied to honor. The psychological comfort, convenience, and order of family members at home grant the woman a significantly elevated status within the family. This situation is contingent not only on her husband's economic income but also causes women to depend psychologically on their husbands and adult children. These women sometimes experience physical violence. The traditional women's group believes that women are respected in their community, loves their people deeply, and practices the traditional customs and rituals of a moderately religious populace. When asked about customs and rituals during an interview, a Kazakh woman living in the Taldykorgan region responded as follows [13]: "Our family has always been religious; no one imposed it on us! In general, Islam is very good. Our mother always made "jeti nan" (a type of bread) on Fridays, and she taught us how to make it. On religious holidays, called "Ait", all the neighbors visit each other, and the table is ready all day. Washing on Fridays was prohibited, so I would spend the day reading because my mother wouldn't even let me wash the diapers on that day. We also circumcised our boys; they became Muslims. We preserve all these traditions in this way".

The third group of women, shaped by Shakirova's view of the Western model, is the modern women's group. She writes that these women are often born into families led by working mothers, who are unhappy in their relationships with male partners and have separated from them. This woman understands the value of psychological and emotional intimacy with her partner at an early age, appreciates the values of friendship, sincerity, trust, and loyalty, and does not rush to marry while always pursuing professional development and self-actualization. She vehemently opposes polygamy and bride kidnapping but does not reject the possibility of premarital sexual relations, and she understands divorce and remarriage. A modern woman builds her marriage on love and spiritual closeness with her partner. She feels disappointed when she fails to find a good relationship, which is rarely encountered. According to them, a marital crisis primarily arises from defining the boundaries of the spouses' personalities and does not occur unless both parties compromise equally. The personal happiness of this woman is based on self-actualization and understanding her loved ones. While she sees problems in the social and economic structure, she looks to the future with confidence, believing that the state will provide peace, social security, and a minimum pension at least in exchange for protecting the country's borders. The modern woman believes that both men and women share equal responsibilities in the family and are equally responsible for family welfare, considering the woman's place to be dignified both in the family and in society. This group of women thinks that there is gender inequality in Kazakhstan and expresses that they are far from the Scandinavian ideal of gender equality. They value personal independence not only in economic terms but also psychologically. Despite seeing herself as independent and feeling no economic, psychological, or physical coercion, she is aware of the risk of encountering sexual violence in public and on the street. Shakirova conveys the following from a conversation with a young woman from the modern women's group [13]: "I am still 17. But I believe that as a future wife, a woman must lead a fulfilling life; being a wife does not mean being a housewife. A real woman should lead an active life, have a good job, and still remain a caring wife. If a woman has a job she loves, having strong social relationships is not enough for the "real woman". A woman must first ensure that her home is tidy and that her children and husband are well-fed; the worst thing is for a woman not to have a family. Because people are happy when they are together in a family. In a family with a woman, the responsibilities of men and women are distributed according to the situation. When the traditional family type completely disappears, husbands will do household chores and try to raise their children equally with their wives".

For both traditional and Soviet women, as well as modern women, family comes

first because this is a result of the resurgence of patriarchy in society, influenced by the propaganda trails following the rebirth of Kazakh national culture in the 1990s. Shakirova [13] stated that among the older and middle-aged women whose youth coincided with the years of socialism, the ideology of Soviet equality still prevails. However, she also pointed out that traditional and modern women's groups do not have the experience of living under socialism, and therefore these young women are shaped by looking at two main role models through the media. In Kazakhstan, since the choice for women presents both the Western liberated woman and the Eastern traditional woman model, it can be said that the discourse of "Western productivity".

Conclusion

The inability of Islamic feminism to develop in post-Soviet countries is closely related to advocacy issues. Among the devout minority who embrace Islam, it becomes nearly impossible to discuss gender equality due to the varying interpretations of Islam. After atheism, considerable efforts are expended to demonstrate to ethnic Muslims – who often lack fundamental knowledge – that peace and happiness reside within Islam. Groups that reject Islam present narratives elevating it, claiming that they provide value to women by emphasizing that paradise lies beneath a mother's feet. Those who seek their rights or voice deficiencies in such a beautifully portrayed version of Islam are often labeled as traitors or enemies of religion. Many ethnic Muslims in post-Soviet countries, describing their Soviet-era experiences as "abnormal" and attributing them to a tyrannical communist regime, have begun searching for the "normal" that they believe existed before communism, clinging to racist and patriarchal attitudes rooted in national traditions.

In the 1990s, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously stated, "After the collapse of the USSR, there is no such thing as society, only individuals". Individuals have witnessed both economic collapse and social trauma, while national and international capitalist forces have greedily plundered public resources. Many people in post-Soviet countries, having lost faith and hope, sought refuge in God or embraced ethnic-nationalist ideologies in a radical manner.

As nationalist oriented people returned to ancestral traditions in the 1990s, they did so without a critical examination, adopting all customs in a packaged manner without questioning their conformity to the norms of the 21st century. A faction within these societies marginalizes those who question national traditions or voice concerns about gender inequality. For Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Azerbaijanis, and Caucasian peoples, distinguishing patriarchal practices from the ethnic-nationalist traditions that significantly shape their national identities is perceived as an assault on their collective identity. As long as efforts to elevate women's status and question their roles in traditions are seen as strikes against the essence of these peoples, the issue of gender equality will persist.

Feminism critiques the Islamic or national culture shaped by patriarchal social structures and advocates for the necessity of creating a new culture and social structure that allows equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, culture, religion, physical health, ability, social class, nationality, or age. However, this understanding of feminism has yet to take root in post-Soviet countries. Kazakh traditions known to negatively impact women – such as the practice of marriage for a bride price, polygamy, and violence against women – continue to be observed despite their adverse effects. While some women may secure their marriages by bearing male children to ensure the continuation of their husband's lineage, bowing to their husband's relatives, and silently serving as brides, they still reject feminism despite their experiences of being married off without consent, subjected to polygamy, or facing societal disdain for being single or divorced.

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