

Crafting the Modern Woman in Azerbaijan: Muslim Women, the State, and Modernity,
1900–1939

by

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The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This study examines the little-known history of cultural transformation initiated by Azerbaijani reformers between the 1850s and 1930s. Relying on a unique body of sources, which include handwritten manuscripts, literary works, unpublished memoirs, periodicals, correspondence, and political parties' records, the research explores the new cultural settings that emerged after the incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Russian empire. New means of communication and new types of sociability, in a global context of urbanization and cosmopolitanization, gave rise to secular modernist reformers and empowered both European-educated Azeri male and female elites to express modern ideas on public education and gender roles. The introduction of secular education for Muslim young women, initiated by modern-educated male intellectuals and industrialists, advanced a cohort of independent and publicly active Azeri women who struggled for equal rights with men. Azeri Muslim women articulated their vision of modernity in native print media and public associations established by Muslim women and for Muslim women.

After the Sovietization of Azerbaijan in 1920, the native reformers continued to promote their agenda to eradicate the power of Islamic and patriarchal traditions. By participating in the new system and installing themselves as the new political and cultural elite, the Azeri reformers obtained the right to speak for the name of their community. Soviet Azeri political leaders developed their own synthesis between the Communist goals and modernizing aspirations of pre-revolution reformers, introducing their own program to create a new nation, *millat*, and a New Woman. However, between 1929–1939, the Stalinist regime, with its new

norms of socialization, education, and indoctrination, replaced all alternative cultural and political discourses.

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Dedication

To my family with love and gratitude

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Abbreviations

Azerbaijan Archive of Kino-Photo Documentary (Baku) AAKFD

Azerbaijan Republic Institute of Manuscripts (Baku) ARIM

Azerbaijan Republic State Archive (Baku) ARDA

Azerbaijan Republic State History Archive (Baku) ARDTA

Russian State Archive of the Socio-Political History (Moscow) RGASPI

State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow) GARF

A Note on Transliteration

This research relies on documents and periodicals written in the Azerbaijani and Russian languages between the 1850s and 1930s. As this research involves encounters between two cultures, two languages, and several alphabets, I have made some arbitrary choices concerning the rendering of the names of places and people. I transliterated Azeri words and terms to favor readability, especially given the lack of a standard transliteration system for the modern Azeri Latin alphabet and language. Thus, I spelled the names of places and people as they were pronounced and used in the Russian Imperial and Soviet periods in Azerbaijan. I maintained Baku rather than Baki, Nakhichevan instead of Nakhchivan. I used Akhundov in place of Akhundzade, and Agayev instead of Alioglu or Agazade. In the meantime, I preserved the original names of people whose names were never russified, such as Mamedkulizade, Javanshir, Agamali ogli, and others.

Russian is transliterated according to the Library of Congress system. I converted texts written with the old Russian alphabet to the modern Russian alphabet before transliterating. Working with the Arabic script, I used the Russian spelling. The Cyrillic script of the Azerbaijani language is transcribed corresponding to the modified Azerbaijani letters of the Soviet period. Thus, “kh” stands for “h”, “dzh” for “j” etc. When working with the Latin script of 1923–1939, I kept to the same system, trying to unify the variations in the Latin scripts in Azerbaijan introduced in 1923–1929, 1929–1939, 1991–1992, and its final version in 1992. The pre-1991 Azeri alphabet had one unique feature: its multiple uses of the apostrophe. For example, “’a” was a glottal stop before the vowel “a”, and “a’” was a prolonged vowel. A chart

provides the equivalent forms for Arabic Persian Azeri, Cyrillic Azeri, and Latin Azeri letters.

Latin letters of the modern Azeri alphabet are pronounced as in English except where indicated otherwise.

Persian version of Arabic script of Azeri Turkic	Latin	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin
1850s – 1923	1923-1929	1929-1939	1958-1991	1992 - until present
آ، ا	A a	A a	А а	A a (as in gut)
ب	B b	B b	Б б	B b
ج	C c	Ç ç	Ч ч	C c (as in John)
چ	Ç ç	C c	Ч ч	Ç ç (as in China)
د	D d	D d	Д д	D d
ای	E e	E e	Е е	E e (as in yellow)
أ/ه	Ə ə	Ə ə	Ә ә	Ə ə (as in dad)
ف	F f	F f	Ф ф	F f
گ	Q q	G g	К к	G g (as in girl)
غ	G g	Q q	Ғ ғ	Ğ ğ
ح	H h	H h	Һ һ	H h
خ	X x	X x	Х х	X x (as in khaki)
ای	I ı	Ь ь	Ы ы	Long e vowel (as in only)
ای	I i	I i	И и	İ I (as in see)
ژ	Z z	Z z	Ж ж	J j (as in dejour)
ك	Q q	K k	К к	K k
ق	K k	Q q	Г г	Q q (as in quest)
ل	L l	L l	Л л	L l
م	M m	M m	М м	M m
ن	N n	N n	Н н	N n
ڭ	N̂ n̂	N̂ n̂		

اؤ	O o	O o	O o	O o
اؤ	Ө ө	Ө ө	Ө ө	Ö ö (as in bird)
پ	P p	P p	П п	P p (as in paper)
ر	R r	R r	P p	R r
ص	S s	S s	C c	S s
ش	Ѕ ѕ	Ѕ ѕ	Ш ш	Ѕ ѕ (as in Shoshana)
ت	T t	T t	Т т	T t
اؤ	Y y	U u	Y y	U u (as in book)
اؤ	U u	Y y	Y Ÿ	Ü ü (as in flute)
و	V v	V v	B б	V v
ي	J j	J j	J j	Y y (as in joy)
ذ	Z z	Z z	З з	Z z
ع,عء	'	'	'	Apostrophe is not in use since 1991

Map of Azerbaijan



Map Collection of Perry-Castaneda Library, University of Texas at Austin
<https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/azerbaijan> (accessed May 9, 2020)

Epigraph

There are interpreters everywhere. Each speaking his own language, even if he has some knowledge of the language of the other. The interpreter's ruses have an open field and he does not forget his own interests.

Jacques Derrida, *Limited INC* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1988), 38.

Introduction

On May 14, 1974, at the Congress that marked the 50th anniversary of the women's journal *Azerbaijan Gadini*, *Azerbaijani Woman*, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, articulated Soviet achievements towards Muslim women's emancipation. In his speech, entitled *Schast'e Zhenshchiny Azerbaidzhana*, *Happiness of Azerbaijani Woman*, Aliyev directed the attention of the female delegates from all Soviet republics to the past and present status of Azerbaijani women:

Dear female delegates,

The journal *Azerbaijan Gadini* always honestly reflected Muslim women's unprivileged position before the Great October Revolution. From its pages we learned about the difficult path that Azerbaijani women took to liberate themselves from harmful patriarchal and Islamic traditions. We learned from the journal that those traditions and their proponents did not recognize women as human beings, keeping them behind the veil and as the objects of men's pleasure from age of nine... Our women were deprived of the right to voice their cries...

The position changed when the enlightened Russian sisters came to demonstrate to Azerbaijani women the path to liberation. This path was dangerous, but it brought to our women freedom from that unhuman existence...The well-known Russian female Communists, such as Yelena Stasova, Nadezhda Kolesnikova, Klavdiia Ishkova and others, dedicated their lives and all knowledge of the revolutionary struggle to liberate Azerbaijani women. They also fostered the Azerbaijani female Communists who devoted their lives to the emancipation movement. Ayna Sultanova, Dzheiran Bairamova, Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, Gulara Kadyrbekova, and others became the prominent revolutionaries and movement activists. Today, one of them is among us. Let us greet Dzheiran Bairamova with our applause....¹

In this speech, Aliyev emphasized that the "friendship of peoples" and Soviet sisterhood, advanced by Russian people, were the crucial factors in enlightening and liberating Muslim women, allegedly the most ignorant part of Azerbaijani society. This rhetoric featured the official

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Schast'e zhenshchiny Azerbaidzhana. Materialy torzhestvennogo sobraniia posviaschennogo 50-tiletiiu zhurnala Azerbaijan Gadini, May 14, 1974* (Azerbaidzhanskoe Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Baku, 1974). Please note, all translations are mine.

discourse that glorified Soviet gender achievements and regarded the emancipation effort of the early 1900s, articulated by the Azerbaijani reformers, as a symbol of Azeri nationalism and pan-Turkism. As a result, those who had any connections to non-Soviet gender programs became excluded from the official Soviet discourse. Dzheiran Bairamova, who was associated with that pre-Soviet modernization drive through her activity and early publications, was the only person among the delegates who can also be identified as a prominent activist in the Soviet emancipation movement of the 1920s–1930s. The rest of the most important Azeri women politicians of the 1920s with links to the pre-Soviet emancipation projects, such as Ayna Sultanova, Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, Gulara Kadyrbekova, and others, had perished in Siberian exiles and prisons during the time of the Great Terror in the 1930s.

A study that is concerned with the process and development of Soviet Azerbaijan and Soviet gender reforms may begin with the examination of Bolshevik methods that changed Azeri society and the lives of Azeri Muslim women. My study, however, is concerned with what I call a “synthesis” between Communist goals and the modernizing aspirations of pre-Soviet reformers in making a modern society and a New Woman. In this work I argue that Bolshevik ideas about Muslim women’s emancipation were not created on virgin soil; rather, they were combined with a pre-revolutionary Azerbaijani discourse on social transformation. I state that Azeri intellectuals’ thoughts about womanhood and motherhood during the late-Imperial period, envisaging women as unveiled, modern, and educated, became integrated into a broader and more aggressive Soviet paradigm of societal and gender reformation.

In the 1920s, the reforms for Azeri Muslim women’s emancipation characterized two ideological frameworks, Communist and late-Imperial modernist. The Communist program stressed class struggle, which required the participation of men and women equally, to build new

social and cultural institutions. The late-Imperial modernist agenda represented the cultural conflict between modernity and traditionalism, to end the presumed cultural backwardness. This synthesis of agendas and ideologies stimulated the Soviet Azeri-native leaders to modernize society in more radical ways than the official Moscow-introduced program of ending female illiteracy, isolation and veiling. I argue that between 1920 and 1929, the discourses over nation and modernization were coming from the bottom up, and in this way, I challenge the Moscow-centered point of view on Soviet history. Arguing that the Soviet modernization program was not a unique effort to transform Muslim society, I also study similar efforts to modernize the society and to make New Woman initiated by the Iranian and Turkish governments during the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, I compare the Azeri experiment of raising Muslim female aviators, a postulated triumph of the native emancipation program, with the analogous programs in two neighboring countries as part of the broader gender emancipation programs.

This work is also concerned with the experiences of Azeri women who responded to the modernist late-Imperial and Soviet calls to liberate them from patriarchal traditions. By connecting the story of Muslim women's education in the Russian empire to that of women in the Azerbaijani socialist republic, the study explores women's roles in influencing state projects which aimed to revolutionize Muslim society. Through the examination of the published writings and personal records of Azeri female gender reformers, I demonstrate that Azeri women were agents of their own liberation. I establish this by exploring the role of the *Tagiev schools*, the first public educational centres for Muslim young women, in shaping the first generation of Azeri feminists. This study also examines the ways in which Muslim modernist literature and culture both reflected and facilitated a growing consciousness about gender reformation.

To understand the cultural environment that gave rise to the late nineteenth-century Muslim reformers' rhetoric on societal modernization, I look at the influence of Azerbaijani geographic phenomena on its culture and history. As Nikki R. Kiddie argues, geography, technology, and ecology, and their interaction with human beings, are extremely important in understanding the development of peoples and states.² The topographic relief of Azerbaijan is dominated by wide valleys with highly fertile soil, large rivers, and rocky, mountainous hills. The relief does not have natural barriers, such as high mountain ranges and large deserts, that could limit human travel and isolate its population. As such, there are no geographical factors that restrict cultural exchanges with other peoples. Consequently, since ancient times Azerbaijan has been at the crossroads of many civilizations and part of the *Silk Road*, the trade route from China and India to Europe, and thus, Azeris had long interrelated intensively with different cultures.

By the early nineteenth century, Azerbaijanis interconnected with diverse groups of peoples and nations: *Shia* Muslim Persians of Iran; *Sunni* Turks of the Ottoman empire; Orthodox Christians of Armenia, Georgia, and Russia; Muslim Tatars; Jews; Kurds; and several nomadic peoples. Cultural interconnections with these neighbors were responsible for Azeris adopting new ideas and cultures, sometimes peacefully, sometimes forcibly. Also, since their incorporation into the Russian empire, 1813 and 1828, Azeris became equal to Russian citizens in their rights and responsibilities. Thus, despite differences with Russian colonizers in religion, language, and lifestyle, which were softened by the tsarist moderate politics to cooperate with Muslims of Transcaucasia, the annexation of Azerbaijan did not produce great barriers between colonizers and colonized. Homi Bhabha, in his study of the relationships between European and non-European populations in India, configured cultural relations between colonized and colonizer in terms of

² Nikki R. Kiddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 338.

“hybridity” rather than “difference” and “otherness.”³ Richard White, in his work on the interconnection of Native Americans and English settlers, argued that despite the acts of domination and resistance there was a “middle ground” in which trade, education, diplomacy, and other forms of exchange took place between native people and colonists, forming new cultural norms.⁴

I look at the role of the process of urbanization and change in the ethnic composition of the regional population in the formation of Azeri reformist discourse. Through this perspective I trace how the expansion of urban culture transformed the traditional Muslim intellectual milieu: the long-established cultural centres, such as Ganja, Sheki, and Shusha, lost their significance in the development of cultural authenticity among Azeris. Baku gained prominence among all these cities because of the oil boom of the 1870s that transformed this small town into the largest oil centre in the world and the largest urban centre in the South Caucasus. In 1872, the demand for kerosene, a result of rapid industrialization all over Europe, pushed the tsarist government to encourage the exploration of oil lands. This reform attracted investors from all over Europe. By 1890 there were one Greek, two German, two Belgian, three French, and six British oil enterprises operating in Baku. The most prominent oil companies belonged to the Nobel Brothers and to the Rothschild family.⁵ The expansion of the oil industry propelled the city’s growth. The construction industry, which also emerged during the oil-boom years, changed the city considerably. Modern architects designed buildings, streets, and parks in popular European styles, reflecting the spirit of the new industrial multiethnic centre.⁶

³ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 13-25.

⁴ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10-18.

⁵ Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21.

⁶ A. L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 22–23.

Thousands of people from different parts of the Russian empire and Iran arrived for industrial jobs, entirely changing the religious and ethnic diversity of the city's population. In 1897 there were 110,900 city dwellers in comparison with its numbers from 1903, when its population increased to 155,876 and in 1913 to 232,200 people.⁷ In 1903 alone, there were 44,257 Azerbaijanis; 56,955 Russians; 26,151 Armenians; 11,132 Iranians; and thousands of Jews, Poles, and Greeks.⁸ Thus, in the beginning of the twentieth century the formerly ethnically and religiously homogenous town became home to a large population of Russians and Armenians. This Christian majority also was more economically prosperous than the formerly ascendant Muslims. In just the oil business, by the beginning of the twentieth century, representatives of the native bourgeoisie of the Baku region owned forty-nine oil enterprises; Armenian entrepreneurs owned fifty-five companies, and Russians, Jews, Georgians, and foreigners owned, respectively, twenty-one, seventeen, six, and nineteen of the total of 167 companies. The oil enterprises that belonged to Azerbaijani businessmen were mainly small, while the Armenian and Russian capitalists dominated among the medium and large businesses.⁹

The Russian economic and administrative elites considering Baku the frontline between Asian and European worlds tried to transform the city into a European modern urban centre. Those Christian dwellers of Baku viewed themselves as the emissaries of European modernity and thus, applied education, scientific knowledge and technology to prove their Europeanness and difference from the native Muslim population. Meantime, those Azeris who lived in or had recently moved to Baku lost connections with their traditional social environments and faced a need to

⁷ N. A. Troinitskii, *Naseleniie imperii po perepisi 28-go ianvaria 1897 goda po uezdam* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. Ia. Minkova, 1905), 98.

⁸ "Perepis' naselenia goroda Baku za 1903 god" *Kasprii*, 22 October 1905.

⁹ Elmira Muradaliyeva, *19-cu Esrin Sonunda Shimali Azərbaycan Shehərləri* (Baku: Baku University Press, 1991), 122–124.

defend their interests and culture in the multi-ethnic urban community that no longer served an Azeri-only population. The pursuit of self-identity within the multi-ethnic community of Baku and at the larger scale of the Russian empire brought a new sense of difference that separated Azeri Muslims from neighboring Iran, in whose orbit Azerbaijan existed for several centuries. The Azeri intellectuals juxtaposed their own model of progress with the backwardness of Iranians while associating themselves with the progressive Europeans. Azeri men of letters in the recently emerged press began to articulate the distinction of Azeri language and celebrated Azeri cultural achievements by creating the first native secular schools, modern print media, opera, and theatre.¹⁰

From the second half of the nineteenth century, Azerbaijani Muslims, trained in Russian educational centres, began to promote European cultural values emphasizing the enlightenment of their people. They proposed cultural change through the elimination of Muslim societal ills rooted in what they perceived, ignorance and cultural backwardness, while holding the clergy and patriarchal traditions responsible for these inadequacies. The reformers believed that Azerbaijani Muslims would achieve equal cultural status with advanced European societies by introducing modern and secular education, an independent print media, and the abolition of gender segregation. The reformers were a minority group who found support among the native oil magnates such as Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev, Musa Nagiev, Murtuza Mukhtarov, Isa bek Ashurbekov, and others. In particular, H. Z. Tagiev became the leading philanthropist whose patronage enabled the Azeri reformers to introduce the new method of education and the project to educate young Muslim women at modern public schools in Baku.

Like Muslim reformers of the Russian Empire, *Jadids*, the Azeri reformers believed that the Islamic world had entered a period of decay and that the remedy would be the enactment of

¹⁰ Audrey L. Altstadt: *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule and The Politics of Culture in the Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920 -1940* (London: Routledge, 2016), 16-24.

modern European-modeled cultural reform based on the new method of education, *usul-i jadid*, a phonetic method of teaching of the alphabet in the newly established schools.¹¹ This term also gave the name to that movement, *Jadidism*. However, despite similar intentions to transform Muslim society, the Azeri reformers not only acted in different ways but also never called themselves *Jadidists* while they discussed the *usul-i jadid* with their Tatar counterparts in the *Tercuman* journal and other periodicals. They always presented themselves with the Azeri terms *taraqqiparvarlar*, progressives; *ziialilar*, intellectuals; or *yiashlar*, youth. Also, unlike Central Asian *Jadids*, they rarely juxtaposed *qadim*, the old-way, with *usul-i jadid*. Azeri reformers always contrasted *qaranliq* with *ishig*, ignorance versus enlightenment, darkness versus light. For these reasons, I apply the term “reformers” or “reform-minded Azeris” instead of “Jadidists” to define the Azeri intellectuals who initiated the period of Azerbaijani cultural reformation.

Adeeb Khalid in his work, entitled *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, argues that there was no unity in the reformative movement because every ethnic group had imposed their own strategies in social struggles depending on the local realities.¹² James Meyer’s statement on the strategy of the *Neshr-i Maarif*, a philanthropic society aiming to eliminate illiteracy among Transcaucasian Muslims, confirms my research findings from the Azerbaijani State History Archive (ARDTA) on the different tactics of the Azeri reformers. Meyer concludes that the leaders of the *Neshr-i Maarif*, unlike those from Central Asia and the Tatar regions, used a different strategy to promote the new type of education. Along with the opening of

¹¹ On *Jadidism* and Russian colonial rule in Turkestan, see: Edward Lazzarini, “Beyond Renewal: The *Jadid* Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern Age,” in *Muslims of Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 151–166; Edward Lazzarini, “Ismail Bey Gasprinskii, the Discourse of Modernism, and the Russians,” *Tatars of the Crimea: Their Struggle for Survival in Central and Inner Asian Studies* 2 (1988), 41–85; Edward Lazzarini, “*Jadidism* at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: A View from Within,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* XVI, no. 2 (1975), 245–277; Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865–1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

¹² Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 9.

brand-new *Jadid* schools, *Neshr-i Maarif* produced modern-educated teachers and supplied them to the government-established schools. This tactic did not meet opposition from the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and allowed the reformers to work in a comfortable environment to achieve their goal of societal modernization.¹³

It is important to note that Azeri intellectuals did not pronounce any desire for territorial and political autonomy until 1917; rather, they strove for cultural autonomy within the Russian Empire. Hence, I do not imply the existence of the Azerbaijani nation before 1917, the year of the Russian empire's collapse, which enabled the Azerbaijani reformers to realize their ideas on the birth of the *millat*, nation, with the establishment of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in 1918. Also, I use the term "Azerbaijan" to refer to the region of the Southeastern Caucasus inhabited by the ethnic Azeris within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. This study does not discuss Azerbaijani national identity either.

My point in discussing "Azerbaijanis" is not to establish who is or is not Azeri, Azeri Turk, Tatar, or Muslim; the latter three were the official titles for the indigenous people of modern-day Azerbaijan in the Russian Imperial period. I only aim to reflect the political use of "Azeri" of the 1920s in government protocols and speeches: the discourse about Azeri women in the 1920s always stressed the "Muslim woman" and "Turkic woman," *tiurchanka* and *musul'manka*, who was veiled and secluded. However, by the end of the 1920s, official rhetoric introduced the title "Azerbaijani woman" and called for her liberation from the veil and from patriarchal traditions as the central tactic in the creation of Soviet Azerbaijan and nationhood. As Harun Yilmaz argues, Azerbaijani national identity was artificially created in the 1930s as part of the Soviet construction of national histories and identities of all the Turkic nations in the Soviet Union. This policy aimed

¹³ James H. Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856-1914* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 123–124.)

to distance Azeri Turks or Muslims from the Turkic world and Iranian influences when relations with Turkey and Iran became increasingly tense.¹⁴

Despite a growing body of literature on societal reorganization in the Middle East and in the former Soviet Islamic territories, the history of Azerbaijani cultural reformation remains understudied. Modern Western historiography largely focuses on aspects of modernization initiated by Muslim reformers, *Jadids*, in Central Asia, Crimea, and the Volga Tatar region.¹⁵ Soviet historians completely ignored the subject of the pre-revolutionary Muslim modernization project in Azerbaijan, considering it nationalistic and bourgeois. The existing historiography on Azerbaijani national and cultural identities is limited to several works that have one unified standpoint: the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Azerbaijani reformists were those who strove to shape Azeri identity and who became a voice of the imagined *millat*, nation. In his major work on the political history of Azerbaijani identity and nationhood, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Tadeusz Swietochowski states that the self-determination of Azerbaijanis as a nation was profound but had never been realized in the form of a truly functional nation-state.¹⁶

Another major study, which for almost three decades was the only English-language source on late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Azerbaijan, belongs to Audrey L. Altstadt: *The*

¹⁴ Harun Yilmaz, “The Soviet Union and the Construction of Azerbaijani National Identity in the 1930s,” *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 4 (2013), 511–533.

¹⁵ Khalid Adeeb, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); S. Akiner, *Islamic People of the Soviet Union* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983); Edward Allworth, *Central Asia: 120 years of Russian Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989); Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia’s Muslims: Islam, Empire, and European Modernity, 1788–1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); V. U. Gankevoch, *Na sluzhbe pravde i prosveshchenii: Kratkii biographicheskii ocherk Ismaila Gasprinskogo (1851–1914)* (Simferopol: Publisher, 2000); Dj. Validov, *Ocherki istorii obrazovannosti i literatury Tatar: (do revoliutsii 1917goda)* (Oxford: Society for Central Asian Studies, 1986); Azade-Ayshe Rorlich, *The Challenge of Belonging: The Muslims of Late Imperial Russia and the Contested Terrain of Identity and Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004); Ş. Hablemitoglu and N. Hablemitoglu, *Şafika Gaspıralii ve Rusya’da Türk Kadın Hareketi, 1893–1920* (Ankara: Publisher, 1988).

¹⁶ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 12-18.

Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule.¹⁷ In her work, Altstadt posits the existence of a timeless and straightforward Azerbaijani identity that was always distinct from that of Azeris in Iran. Holly Shissler, in her intellectual biography of Ahmet Agaoglu entitled *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Agaoglu and the New Turkey*, maintains that Azeris of the Russian Empire had much in common with Russian, Turkic, and Persian identities without seeing any conflict in moving between those societies. She supports this statement with the life-stories of those Azeris who did not accept the Sovietization of Azerbaijan in 1920, and either moved to Turkey and became self-confessed Turks and prominent politicians or intellectuals in the newly formed Turkish Republic, or emigrated to Iran and developed into fully integrated Iranian citizens.¹⁸ James Meyer, in his work *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856–1914*, examines the life of Yusuf Akchura and a group of individuals known as pan-Turkists. He states that these intellectuals freely passed between the Russian and Ottoman empires because they were deeply embedded within both of these communities.¹⁹

The process of Russian Muslims' societal transformation was part of global changes in the last decade of the nineteenth century: the spread of modern scientific knowledge, the industrialization of production, the reduction of distances, and urbanism. This process began in Europe and soon, conveyed by European-educated intellectuals, reached the Western part of the Russian empire and proceeded rapidly to its Eastern territories. As Antonio Gramsci's theory on "cultural hegemony" explains, in the mid-nineteenth century Europe began to define the cultural norms of the rest of the world.²⁰ The European-educated Azeris' pursuit of the new forms of

¹⁷ Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 10-25.

¹⁸ Holly A. Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Agaoglu and the New Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 10-25.

¹⁹ Meyer, *Turks Across Empires*, 2-19.

²⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 765 -767.

intellectual production, the new vision of the world and their place in it, was part of that global search for modernity – when modern conditions transform traditions and produce new cultural forms. Paul Rabinow, in his work *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, states that the term “modernity” is impossible to define; rather, it is more important to track the diverse ways that scholars claimed to be modern.²¹ Thus, I choose to use the terms “modernity” and “modernism” sparingly and do not aim to find an answer to whether the pre- and Soviet Azeri reformers were modernists or not. Instead, I focus on their projects of remaking both society and gender roles in the context of the Azeri societal makeover that was part of the global phenomenon since the end of the nineteenth century, from the Egyptian colonial context to interwar Europe and the Middle East.²²

In the interwar years, 1918–1939, several states introduced reforms to eliminate perceived backwardness and transform societies by mobilizing their populations in extraordinary ways.²³ Remaking women’s status and social roles by granting them greater public positions was a significant part of such programs. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that the history of Muslim women’s emancipation should be studied not through the history of the reformation of Islam and its gender norms but through the prism of various political projects undertaken by states that were different from each other historically and ideologically, as well as by class politics and the experience of colonialism. Kandiyoti states that a crucial part of those reforms was the call to mobilize labor

²¹ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 9.

²² Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* (Cairo, 1898); Qasim Amin, *The New Woman: Two Documents on Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo, 1899); Ismail Gaspirali, *Gadinlar* (Bakhchisarai, 1881); Mirza Aga Khan Kirmani, *Sad Khatabah* (Tehran, 1889); Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture 1865–1946* (University Press of Florida, 2002); Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); M. Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

²³ Stephen Kotkin, “Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjecture,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2001), 111–64; David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity (1917–1941)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

forces, regardless of gender, to meet national needs for industrialization.²⁴ In her major study entitled *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change*, Gail W. Lapidus also claims that the Soviet state emancipated women because of its need to consolidate power rather than because of respect for feminist concerns.²⁵ However, the works of Margot Badran, Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, Kathryn Libal, and Lila Abu-Lughod discuss the history of feminist political movements. These works focus not on political programs, but on women's agency that aimed to transform women's lives in colonial, quasi-colonial, and nationalist contexts.²⁶

The Soviet emancipation policy has attracted broad scholarly attention. Western historiography presents the socialist gender discourse as a part of the new Soviet-style colonial policy. Gregory Massell's work *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia (1919–1929)*, published in 1974 and based on secondary sources provided by Soviet authorities, shaped this historiographical perception for many decades.²⁷ Massell states that the Bolsheviks transformed cultural practices and gender relations and mobilized local women as a sort of oppressed class or "surrogate proletariat," the group that along with poor peasants had the most to gain and least to lose by accepting Soviet authority. Jörg Baberowski, in his work about Azerbaijan in 1920s and 1930s, argues that the Soviet Union was a colonial empire that aggressively transformed gender relations and cultural practices and thus,

²⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 2 - 3.

²⁵ Gail W. Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change* (Location: University of California Press, 1978), 13- 18.

²⁶ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Kathryn Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation Istanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 31–52; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²⁷ Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia (1919–1929)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

faced violent opposition to these reforms.²⁸ However, because Baberowski uses only Party documents and Russian-language published sources from the 1920s–1930s, he misses the voices of Azeri Communists who advanced and discussed the Soviet emancipation drive in Azeri-language documents, in the press and in clubs for Muslim women.

The work of Fannina Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, also focuses on government and Communist Party actions. Halle provides a lively portrait of Azeri and other Soviet Muslim women whom she met during her trip to the Soviet Union in early 1930 and illustrates women's response to those state initiatives, calling them liberating.²⁹ Nayareh Tohidi, in her work *Azeri in Private, Soviet in Public: Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, introduces the opposite point of view. Tohidi offers a dichotomous model of the domestic and public statuses of Soviet Azeri women. She states that Muslim women of the socialist republic persistently maintained their ethnic Azeri traditions, customs, and language in their private lives as a protest against the imposed public Soviet reality.³⁰ Farideh Heyat, in her socio-anthropological study entitled *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, explores the interactions between Soviet institutions and Muslim culture that shaped the lives of Azeri women. She illustrates the links between gender, ethnicity, and nationalism, basing her argument on literary works, periodicals, and personal interviews. Heyat concludes that even though the Soviet system emancipated Azeri females, making many of them highly educated professionals, the ethnic community always regarded them as the preservers of traditional norms of conduct and custodians

²⁸ Jörg Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde: Stalinizm na Kavkaze* (Moskva: Rosspen, Fond "Prezidentskii tsentr B. N. El'tsina", 2010).

²⁹ Fannina W. Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, trans. Margaret M. Green (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938).

³⁰ N. Tohidi, *Soviet in Public, Azeri in Private: Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

of ethnic identity. Thus, the Azeri women had to observe strict sexual standards and perform all domestic responsibilities.³¹ Admittedly, these studies mainly examine the process of abolition of old traditions and female employment and do not investigate the link between the Soviet emancipation effort and local initiatives shaped by pre-revolution gender discourse.

Unlike other scholars, Marianne Kamp in her article about the Soviet state-led campaign on unveiling in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan investigates the development of veil abolition and introduces the links between pre- and post-revolution emancipation programs.³² In her major work on Muslim women's emancipation in Uzbekistan entitled *New Woman of Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*, Kamp also recognizes that pre-revolutionary ideas about gender reform gained ground in the Soviet period. She argues that many Muslim intellectuals and politicians joined the Communist Party and promoted their agenda of societal transformation and the abolition of gender segregation that they could not accomplish in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Also, Kamp challenges the notion that Uzbeks were the objects of Russian and later Soviet colonialism. In opposition to this statement, she introduces them as the primary actors in the modernist transformation that they initiated long before the Bolshevik revolution. Moreover, some of the actors in the Soviet emancipation drive were Muslim women who voiced their concerns about patriarchal traditions.³³

Soviet historians examining the socialist gender achievements in Azerbaijan made little use of the native-language press and documents, considering them nationalistic because of the

³¹ Farideh Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (London: Routledge, 2002).

³² Marianne R. Kamp, "Women-initiated Unveiling: State-led Campaigns in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan," in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (Location: Routledge, 2014), 205–228; Azade-Ayshe Rorlich, "The 'Ali Bayramov' Club, the Journal *Sharg Gadini*, and Socialisation of Azeri Women, 1920–30," in *Central Asian Survey*, no. 3–4 (1986): 221–239.

³³ Marianne Kamp, *New Woman of Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

predominance of ideological biases and censorship in Soviet historiography.³⁴ Also, Soviet scholars were not systematically trained to read the *aski alifba*, the Persian version of the Arabic alphabet, or the Latin characters that were the official scripts between 1850 and 1929 in Azerbaijan. Thus, they dismissed a number of sources that illustrated the emancipation drive of the Azerbaijani reformers and celebrated gender equality only under the socialist banner in terms of access to education and jobs, and the ability to participate in political life.³⁵ Along with this, the topic of women's education in old-Imperial Azerbaijan has not been the subject of any existing historical accounts. In contrast, the subject of women's education has been an important focus in the analysis of the Soviet era that started in the 1920s. This gap in the historiography has led to a popular misconception that the public education of Muslim girls only started in the Soviet period.

Modern Azeri historians, like their Soviet predecessors, have also chosen a non-comprehensive approach to the history of women's emancipation. The post-Soviet writings of modern Azerbaijani scholars, based on a few selected facts, documents, and unreferenced life-stories, are descriptive rather than analytical and portray every aspect of Soviet policies targeting Azerbaijani Muslim women as a manifestation of totalitarianism and Soviet colonialism.³⁶ Furthermore, focusing mainly on the conflict between the Soviet emancipation effort and local cultures, they call the Soviet gender program "genocidal" and ignore the voices of native gender

³⁴ A. S. Beliaeva, *Zhenskie sovety* (Moscow: Mysl', 1962); Bibi Pal'vanova, *Emansipatsiia musul'manki: opyt raskreposhcheniia zhenshchiny Sovetskogo Vostoka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982); Gleb Snesarev, *Raskreposhchenie zhenshchiny Sovetskogo Vostoka ot gnetia religii* (Moscow: Gosizdat SSSR, 1939); N. I. Dubinina, *Pobeda velikogo Oktabria i pervie meropriiata partii v reshenii zhenskogo voprosa* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981); Yelena Yemelianova, *Revoliutsiia v zhenskoii zhizni* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1985); Evgabel', *Bor'ba za osvobojdenie zhenshchiny Vostoka i religii* (Moscow: Gosizdat SSSR, 1935).

³⁵ T. Musaeva, *Bor'ba za razvitie narodnogo obrazovaniia v Azerbaidzhane v gody pervoi piatiletki* (Baku: AzGiz, 1964); A. Sultanova, *Ayna Sultanova (k vos'midesiatiletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia)* (Baku: AzGiz, 1976); A. Sultanova, *Schastlivye zhenchshiny sovetskogo Azerbaidzhana*, (Baku: Azerbaidzhanskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1964).

³⁶ Gulzar Ibrahimova, *Azerbaijan gadini: tarih ve gerceklik* (Baki: Elm, 2009); S. Mammedova, Bagirov Kh, *Soyqirim analardan bashlanir* (Baki: Vatan, 2003).

activists who promoted Soviet-style societal transformation. The glorification of the modernization efforts performed by a group of Azeri intellectuals in the early 1900s towards education and women's emancipation is regarded as broad societal progress. The late-Imperial era is viewed as a period of Azerbaijani cultural renaissance. This concept arose with the end of Soviet hegemony and the need for detachment from the Soviet past. However, this historical discourse, which is based on the neglect of primary sources, produces limited scholarship about gender reformation of the 1900s–1930s.

Modern Azeri historians insist that women in Azerbaijan received equal rights with men during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic [ADR], 1918–1920, as it was one of the priorities of the national government.³⁷ However, the ADR's official records, available at the Azerbaijan State Archive (ARDA), testify that the young republic did not issue any legal act regarding women's rights and their emancipation. In fact, it was the Russian Provisional Government that released, in July 1917, a decree that granted all women of the Russian Empire the right to vote.³⁸ Women's rights were not a priority of the short-lived Baku Commune, April–July 1918, in which Bolsheviks played a prominent role, either.³⁹ After the Bolsheviks re-gained power in April 1920, they proceeded with gender reforms. The Bolshevik reforms, pursuing ethnic equality and supplemented by ideological indoctrination, secured them some support among various segments of the population. One of the first acts of the new regime was the acknowledgement of women's equal rights with men across the former Russian Empire.

³⁷ Ibrahimova, *Azerbaijan gadini*; A. Muradova, *Vovlechenie zhenshchiny Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR v organy gosudarstvennoi vlasti* (Baku: Nurlan, 2007).

³⁸ *Vozzvanie*, Provisional Committee of the State Duma, *Izvestiia* (March 3, 1917 in old style Russian calendar. March 16, 1917 in new style calendar). R. C. Ruthchild, *Equality and Revolution: Women's Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905–1917* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), xviii.

³⁹ A. Dubner, *Bakinskii proletariat v gody revoliutsii (1917–1920)* (Baku: AZGIZ, 1931), 80–93; S. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vols. 1 and 2 (Moskva: Politizdat, 1978), 2:130–140.

My study is an inquiry into the limited historiography on ideas about societal modernization, Azeri women, and their transformation. This study is also a response to those works that consider the call for Soviet emancipation in Azerbaijan as an act of colonialism and dismiss the voices of the Azeri activists who supported the Soviet appeal. This research also challenges the modern Azeri concept that glorified every pre-revolution project of modernity calling it “a mass movement.” I intend to challenge these two notions. First, I argue that Azeri Muslim women were not the passive objects and victims of the Soviet state emancipation project. Second, I state that those pre-revolution reorganizations did not become a widespread movement but were limited only to Baku and its surroundings. However, I acknowledge that despite this limit the reforms in young women’s education changed the societal position of urban Muslim women and gave rise to the women’s emancipation activists of the Soviet period. Hence, this work aims to fill several broad gaps in the history of Azerbaijani cultural reorganization that experienced several sharp turns between 1900 and 1939.

This work is an exploration of Azerbaijani history set within its multiple contexts: as part of the Russian Imperial colony from 1813 to 1917; during the period of the national independence of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, 1918–1920; and as a socialist republic, AzSSR, 1920–1939. To conduct this study, I examined the literary works of the earliest reformers, who popularized their ideas in novels, pamphlets, and periodicals. I studied documentation on the projects undertaken by Azeri enlightener and oil magnate Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev. These historical materials are available at the Azerbaijan Republic State History Archive (ARDTA), and the Azerbaijan Republic Institute of Manuscripts (ARIM). I investigated the official Soviet directives and Communist party protocols, located at the Azerbaijan Republic State Archive (ARDA).

I also studied the women's journals *Ishig*, *Enlightenment*, and *Sharg Gadini*, *Woman of the East*, personal diaries, and the correspondence of those Muslim women who struggled for gender equality and faced ostracism from conservative members of Islamic society. In this way, I emphasized female voices and presented Muslim women as active players who put their imprint on that movement by challenging the patriarchy. The State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) provided information on the Bolshevik agencies that pursued female emancipation. The Department of Nationalities at the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, All-Union Committee for the Improvement of Labor and Living Conditions among Muslim Women, and the USSR Prosecutor Bureau, were particularly important resource bases for this research. The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) equipped me with the files of Women's Committees, revealing ideological aspects of the communist policies around gender reorganization in the Soviet Islamic territories.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One: The Russian Muslim Society of Azerbaijan in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

This chapter examines the transformation of traditional Azerbaijani Muslim society after its incorporation into the sphere of Russian civilization analyzing the writings produced by prominent intellectual leaders and state directives on education reform. First, I explain the formation of a new pro-European group of intellectuals by analyzing their ideas about factors that kept Muslim society behind advanced Western civilization. Then, I examine their thoughts on improving the position of the Muslim community through the introduction of independent media and *usul-i jadid*, new-method, education. I also focus on the interaction between the native philosophers' networks and the Russian state to demonstrate the existence of an autonomous

Muslim intellectual domain within the Russian empire in the South Caucasian region during the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Two: Reformists' Discourse on Muslim Women's Societal Position: Educating the Educators of the Nation

This part of the dissertation illustrates the Azeri reformers' understandings of the desired societal order. It shows how their formulation of modernity through education and gender reforms was as much a result of the profound transformation of Muslim societies in the decades of imperial Russian rule as a response to it. It demonstrates how Islamic and traditional fundamental predispositions and predilections determined women's position in society. It also compares the Azerbaijani discourse on women's emancipation with similar movements in Turkestan and Iran. This chapter traces how the pre-revolutionary ideas about female emancipation later gained ground in Bolshevik policies.

The chapter also examines the Azerbaijani intellectuals' ideas on gender reformation through the introduction of public education for Muslim girls and young women, as well as ideas about the abolition of veiling and seclusion in the urban centre – Baku. It focuses on a specific project, the first public schools and female teacher training centre established by H. Z. Tagiev, that changed the societal position of urban Muslim women. I argue in this chapter that the modern public schooling program shaped a new generation of Muslim women who continued the policies for female emancipation after the sovietization of Azerbaijan in 1920.

Chapter Three: The Bolshevik Revolution and the New Bid for Women's Rights in Azerbaijan

This section of the thesis demonstrates the political transformation from colonial Russian Azerbaijan into Soviet Azerbaijan and examines the Soviet state's method of changing Muslim women's position. It also examines the transformation of many leading pre-revolution intellectuals into pious Communists and their central role in political and cultural life. I argue that they believed in adjusting their agenda for societal modernization to Bolshevik state policy and thus, creating a modern Azerbaijan.

This chapter also focuses on women's education as the main aspect of the Soviet gender emancipation program. The chapter argues that the program was an ideological continuation of the efforts of pre-revolution reformers, who had expanded their ideas about women's enlightenment into the Soviet educational system. I also illustrate the steps taken by the Azerbaijani Women's Division of the Communist Party, *Zhenotdel*, to empower Muslim women: organizing specific crisis centres for Muslim women to voice their problems, clubs (particularly the Ali Bairamov Club), and reading circles at bathhouses and private houses.

Chapter Four: Literature and the Journal "Sharg Gadini" as a Mirror of Gender Reforms in Azerbaijan

This part of the dissertation focuses on the women's journal *Sharg Gadini*, reviewing the journal's appeal to Muslim women. I also compare the Azeri native journal's message with the central all-woman journal *Kommunistka* official discourse to illustrate how native Communists interpreted the Soviet emancipation program in local realities. The chapter also investigates the

Soviet Azeri-language literature arguing that the writers continued the pre-revolution reformists' discussion on the importance of educated and unveiled women for the benefit of the nation.

Chapter Five: The Thorny Road to Liberation

This chapter focuses on the implementation of Soviet gender policies, arguing that their flow was never uniform because regional Communists had their own vision about gender reformation. The Azeri government and Communist Party leaders, in pursuit of legal equality, the abolition of patriarchal matrimonial traditions, and the ending of women's seclusion and veiling, changed the course of the Soviet gender reforms and seriously debated the Moscow program. Thus, this chapter studies the debates and conflicts surrounding the implementation of gender policies during the construction of the socialist state in the late 1920s among the Azerbaijani gender activists, whose worldview stemmed from the pre-Soviet gender discourse, and the Moscow officials.

This chapter also examines the outcomes, both the acceptance and the resistance, of the Soviet reforms of the 1920s that promised to elevate women's status in Muslim society. I argue that this resistance stemmed mainly from the desire of the traditional patriarchy to preserve their power and social status rather than from hatred of Soviet colonialism. This part of the study investigates the causes of the murders of emancipated Azeri Muslim women and the effect of those actions on the process of the Soviet gender campaign by analyzing court documents of that period.

Chapter Six: The Sky is Not a Limit

In this chapter, I examine the Azerbaijani government project to introduce Azeri women to aviation as the highest point of Muslim women's emancipation. I focus on the life stories of three Azerbaijani female aviators, two of whom were combat pilots during World War Two. This chapter also identifies how education and military service became the central mechanisms in making the "Liberated Muslim Woman of the East."

This chapter also demonstrates that Soviet policies on changing women's status and social role as part of societal modernization during the interwar years were not unique. I compare Soviet emancipation policies, in particular in creating female pilots, with those enforced in Turkey and Iran, countries that had strong cultural connections with Azerbaijan. I aim to find out how distinctive the Soviet experience was by comparing how the governments dismantled the traditional patriarchal institutions and legal authority of Islam in their rush for modernity.

Conclusion

The conclusion summarizes findings on the late Imperial and Bolshevik gender emancipation policies. The epilogue provides some information about the long-term consequences of these policies in the new post-Soviet realities.

Chapter One

The Russian Muslim Society of Azerbaijan in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

In the summer of 1988, my father took me, a teenaged girl born and raised in Ukraine, on a trip across Azerbaijan, from Baku to his hometown in Mountainous Karabakh. We travelled for several days and visited Azerbaijani towns, such as Shusha, Khankendi, Barda, Agdam, Ter-Ter, and other places. We spent the nights at the houses of our relatives or in rented rooms in private homes. During that trip, my father introduced me to the history, geography, architecture, and people of Azerbaijan. Months later, he suggested to me that I read the books of Azeri writers to become familiar with the native literature. One of the first books that I read was the collection of novels by Dzhilil Mamedkulizade (1869–1932), a famous Azeri writer, who satirically criticized the archaic societal ills of the Azeri Muslim community such as clericalism, common illiteracy, gender segregation, veiling, and marriages to minors. In particular, the short story entitled *Iki Balish Bir Birinin Ianinda, Two Pillows Next to Each Other*, fascinated me deeply. The plot of this story reminded me of that journey with my father and allowed me to juxtapose my personal experience with the experiences of the main characters.

In the story, Mamedkulizade recalled a trip with his teenaged daughter from Karabakh to Zakatala, to enroll her into the boarding school at the Pedagogical College, in the early 1920s. During that trip they had to stay overnight at someone's private house, because all the city's hotels were under construction or full. Mamedkulizade described how the female hosts offered them one room with one big bed and two pillows placed together. To prepare for sleep, the author moved

one pillow to a small couch several times, however, the hosts always put it back. Covering their faces as a sign of modesty, these women wanted them to enjoy themselves and offered more sweets for the night. After his explanation about their fatherly-daughter relationship and pointing out his old age, 58, he bitterly noticed that they did not believe him. Moreover, they assured him that many old Muslim men in this town had wives even younger than his lady. Mamedkulizade painfully concluded that as long as people considered every Muslim man and woman who appeared together in public as a couple and saw every underaged woman as an object for man's pleasure, the nation would remain parochial and backward. "Shame on us," he exclaimed.¹

The story deeply captivated my attention and I looked around to find any traces of the veil and cases of marriages with female minors. Finding no remnants of those archaic traditions, I started to think about the factors that had changed traditional Muslim society during the past six decades. Since that time, I directly and indirectly tried to find out who, when, and what was behind the significant changes that transformed one Muslim society from patriarchal into modern by granting women rights and freedoms, abolishing veil and female isolation, and introducing girls and women to secular public education. This work is the explanation of the factors that changed the societal position of Azeri Muslim women.

Two factors played an important role in the transformation of the life of the Azeri Muslim community: one was Russia's conquest and control of Transcaucasia in the early nineteenth century, and the other was the emergence of the reform discourse about nation, the reorganization of society, and women's position. The incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Russian Empire stimulated the formation of a secular, educated, male elite that initiated societal reformation at the end of the nineteenth century. The tsarist government itself encouraged the emergence of this

¹ Dzhaliil Mamedkulizade, *Novelly, Fel'etony, Rasskazy, P'esy* (Baku: Azerneshr, 1989), 165–171.

European-type intellectual cohort. However, the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment who opened schools for Muslims, and the Muslim reformers who founded reformed *maktabs*, schools, had completely different agendas. The tsarist bureaucrats hoped for the ultimate Russification of the Transcaucasian Muslims, while the founders of reformed *maktabs* hoped to empower the Transcaucasian Muslims as Azerbaijani Turks to become culturally equal within the Russian empire and the whole Western world, distancing them from the allegedly “backward” and decaying Islamic civilization.

Thus, this part of the work examines the transformation of traditional Azerbaijani Muslim society after its incorporation into the sphere of Russian civilization. This chapter builds its arguments on analysis of the writings produced by prominent Azeri intellectuals and Russian state directives on education reform. I first explain the formation of a new pro-European group of intellectuals by analyzing their ideas about what they believed had kept Muslim society behind the more advanced Western civilization. Then, I examine their views on improving the position of the Muslim community through the introduction of independent media and the adoption of *usul-i jadid*, a new method of education. I focus on the interaction between the native philosophers’ networks and the Russian state to demonstrate the existence of an autonomous Muslim intellectual domain within the Russian empire in the South Caucasian region during the late nineteenth century.

Azerbaijani Enlighteners in the Quest for Modernity: Defining Backwardness through an Admiration for the West

Enlightening our Muslims, who are dark and ignorant, will not come through one play or an article. We need to educate them persistently, translate Western scientific

books and fight against those harmful backward individuals, namely Islamic priests, who dominate in our homeland. Gasan Bek Melikov Zardabi, 1875.²

Azerbaijan, which rests in the South Caucasus of Eurasia, has been in the orbit of Iranian civilization since ancient times. In the late eighteenth century, several self-ruling Azerbaijani khanates gained cultural and political independence from the Iranian state. In the early nineteenth century, the Russian Imperial government began its expansion into this region, seeking to gain control over the transit route to Iran, India, and Afghanistan.³ This expansion provoked two wars between Iran and the Russian Empire in 1813 and 1826–28. The outcome of the first war was the Treaty of Gulistan that effectively legitimized the Russian victory and the inclusion of modern-day Azerbaijan, Dagestan, and Eastern Georgia into the Russian Empire. The second Russo-Iranian War ended with the signing of the Turkmanchai Treaty in 1828 and further strengthened Russian presence in the region. It also resulted in the annexation of additional territories from Iran. Both treaties legitimized the division of Azerbaijani territory into two parts. The northern and smaller part of greater Azerbaijan became a part of the Russian empire and the larger approximately two-thirds of its former land, remained under Iranian control. At that time, the two empires established an official border along the Araz River, promising to respect this condition as a final agreement.⁴

Since the early nineteenth century, therefore, Muslims of the South Caucasus had been subject to Russian imperial policies. The new authorities left the administration in the hands of Azerbaijanis and did not intervene in legal, economic, and administrative matters. The Persian

² G. Zardabi, “Tekhsilin faydalari khagginda,” *Akinchi*, November 4, 1875.

³ V. L. Velichko, *Russkoe delo i mezhplemennye voprosy* (Saint-Petersburg: Tipografiia Arteli Pechatnogo Dvora, 1904), 17–19.

⁴ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 5–7.

language was still the official language of local administration. As before the annexation, the local landowners, *beks* and *aghas*, controlled the life of the peasants, *radzhbars*, and the whole community.⁵ They were also responsible for tax collection. Most of the population were peasants; however, there were also craftsmen and traders who lived in towns. Azerbaijani Muslims belonged mainly to the *Shia* denomination of Islam, with some *Sunnis* who lived mostly in the northern parts of the country. *Sharia* courts retained all power in domestic and communal conflicts.⁶ At the end of the 1830s, the Russian government liquidated *khanates* and divided Azerbaijani territory into seven provinces under the rule of the military commander. In 1841, the government dismantled the military administration, partially because they could defeat the opposition of native peoples to Russian rule and, thus, introduced a civil type of administration. Two other legal changes pertaining to land ownership and authority followed in 1841. They deprived all existing landowners and the local aristocracy of authority over towns and tax collection, providing them with lifelong grants from the crown as compensation.⁷

In 1845, the new administrative reorganization came to life: the Viceroyalty of the Caucasus. The viceroy was subordinated directly to the tsar and was responsible for the military and civil affairs of the region. The first viceroy Count Mikhail Vorontsov (1782 – 1856), believed in recognizing cooperative with the native elite rather than in assimilation and Russification. Thus, by a decree from 1846, the government recognized the rights of *khans*, *beks*, and *aghas* to private property and heredity. Moreover, to form loyal allies from the Muslim gentry, the regime eased the local nobility's access to the civil service. However, this policy came to a halt with M. Vorontsov's retirement in 1865 and the introduction of reforms that proposed total Russification

⁵ *Bek*, *aga*, and *khan* are the titles of the landowners and aristocrats in pre-revolution Azerbaijan.

⁶ Velichko, *Russkoe delo i mezhplemennye voprosy*, 9–11.

⁷ Velichko, *Russkoe delo i mezhplemennye voprosy*, 28–30.

and integration. At the end of the 1860s, the tsarist regime introduced the universal Russian court system and legal procedures in criminal cases. Family matters such as marriage and divorce remained, however, under the jurisdiction of the *Sharia* court.⁸

In the mid-1860s, the native gentry lost many rights over the land. Moreover, the tsarist regime initiated the large-scale resettlement of Russian people in the country. The first Russian settlements came into existence in the 1830s and were mainly along the official border with Iran; the settlers had limited contact with the original inhabitants by living mostly in their own districts.⁹ However, from the mid-1860s, Russian peasants, attracted by government promises to grant them free land plots, arrived in Azerbaijan in large numbers. By 1913, there were forty-four settlements in the central part of Azerbaijan, Shirvan, and they included 54,000 acres of high-quality irrigated land.¹⁰ Along with this, Russians occupied the leading positions in civil offices.

Until the mid-1870s, the Russian authorities held the newly gained territory as a base for the extraction of raw materials and agricultural goods. In the mid-1860s, the Russian government initiated the cultivation of much-needed cotton and tobacco there, products that North American producers stopped exporting because of the Civil War in America.¹¹ The production of cotton and tobacco spurred the emergence of textile manufacturing and the growth of agriculture. In the 1870s, the abolition of various local monies and the introduction of an all-imperial, Russian currency, along with a universal system of weights and measurements, also contributed significantly to a revival of the regional economy. The Municipal Law of 1870, which allowed the establishment of self-ruling assemblies in all urban communities, helped to develop the

⁸ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 19.

⁹ Velichko, *Russkoe delo i mezhplemennye voprosy*, 27.

¹⁰ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 16.

¹¹ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 18.

Azerbaijani towns of Baku, Ganja, Kuba, Shamakhi, Nukha, and Shusha into trade, manufacturing, and administrative centres.¹²

Until the mid-nineteenth century the traditional group of intellectual elites that prevailed in South Caucasian Muslim society consisted of the *ulema*, a community of male Islamic scholars who received spiritual education at the *maktab* and *madrasah* and who were generally the sons of Islamic scholars.¹³ The members of the *ulema* enjoyed strong authority in determining the way that a given Muslim community believed and behaved by interpreting the larger world and the doctrines of Islam. As contact with Russians increased, and familiarity with Western cultural norms spread, a new intellectual elite emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Since the mid-1860s, this new intelligentsia had consisted of young men who had partially lost their connections with the traditional intellectual environment: they received elementary education at *maktab*, and they continued their education at Transcaucasian teacher seminaries in Gory and Tiflis, or at Russian and European secular universities. They skipped the traditional path of training at the *madrasah*.

The rise of this new type of intelligentsia was a result of the involvement of the local Muslim gentry in the Russian environment that started admitting them to imperial civil and military service in accordance with viceroy Vorontsov's projects. The tsarist regime strongly supported this process, aiming to neutralize any association with Iran and to foster loyalty to Russian rule.¹⁴ This new Muslim elite sent their sons to study in the Russo-Tatar schools that had developed in 1840s.¹⁵ As a result, a new intelligentsia, *obrazovannye*, emerged.¹⁶ With time, this term was applied only to those men who were trained in Russian or European educational

¹² Muradaliyeva, *19-cu Esrin Sonunda Shimali Azərbaycan Shehərləri*, 12–16.

¹³ *Maktab* – Islamic elementary school. *Madrasah* – Islamic high educational institution to prepare religious and intellectual leaders.

¹⁴ Audrey Altstadt, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920–40* (London: Routledge, 2016), 5.

¹⁵ Until the end of the nineteenth century the Russian sources referred to Azerbaijanis as Tatars or Transcaucasian Muslims.

¹⁶ In Russian, *Obrazovannye* means “educated persons.”

institutions, whereas those who obtained education in traditional Islamic scholar centres were known by the Azerbaijani titles: *medani*, *ziialar*, or *alimler*. Although both labels illustrate the coexistence of the new and old-fashioned types of intelligentsia, only those who were trained in European educational centres were considered to be truly intelligent.

The European-educated men proposed several projects by combining their traditional intellectual milieu with their newly acquired Russian values. These first projects designed to modernize the Muslim community to fit the more economically and educationally advanced West became evident in the mid-nineteenth century. Abass Gulu Agha Bakikhanov and Mirza Fatali Akhundov defined aspects that kept Azerbaijani Muslim society from progress.¹⁷ Bakikhanov was the first to provide an examination of Caucasian Muslims' position and proposed the plan to reform the educational system to make it free from religious dogma. His project stressed the need to establish schools for Muslim young men where science and law would prevail over religious studies, though he recognized the need for limited spiritual training for a balanced upbringing.¹⁸ Akhundov went farther in his project to reform Muslim society: he blamed Islamic norms and outdated traditions for keeping his people behind the literate and industrial West. Imperial and later Soviet officials praised Akhundov for this discourse as the model Muslim intellectual who paved the road to modernism in the Caucasus region, but his anti-Islamic expressions prevented him from travelling to Iran to visit his relatives because of threats to his life, and his major philosophical works have never been published in Iran.¹⁹

¹⁷ Abass Gulu Agha Bakikhanov (1794–1847) was also the son of the last Baku ruler and a translator during the Turkmanchai Treaty negotiations. Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812–1878) was an Azerbaijani writer and philosopher. Akhundov was the founder of new playwriting, different from medieval Muslim literature, and the creator of the modern literary Azerbaijani language.

¹⁸ A. K. Bakikhanov, *Proekt uchrezhdeniia musul'manskogo uchilishcha sostavlennyi maiorom Abass-Kuli-Agoiu Bakikhanovym 20 fevralia 1832 goda* (Baku: Elm, 1983).

¹⁹ Mirza Fatali Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, (Baku: AzGiz, 1963), 313.



Figure 1. Abbas Kuli ogli Bakikhanov (1794–1847) **Figure 2.** Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812–1878)

The formation of M. F. Akhundov’s worldview, which had a vital influence on Azeri intellectual discourse, occurred in 1832 when he became a student of Mirza Shafi Vazekh (1796–1852), the famous Azerbaijani mystic, poet, and calligrapher. Denouncing *Shia* clergy as dishonest people who used religion to keep their power among the ignorant commoners, he prevented Akhundov from becoming a clergyman. Akhundov described this transformation in his letters:

One day, the honorable Mirza Shafi asked me why I wanted to study Islam. I answered that I have wished to become a clergyman. Mirza Shafi asked then whether I want to become a hypocrite and a charlatan. Such questions surprised and shocked me...Mirza Shafi looked at me and suggested not to waste my life by becoming a part of this monstrous group of people and to choose another profession. When I asked him about the reasons for his hatred of the clergy, he revealed the matters that removed the curtain of ignorance from my eyes. After this episode, I began to hate the clergy and I changed my intentions.²⁰

In 1834, Akhundov began a career as a translator of oriental languages (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) in Tiflis at the Russian Imperial Viceroyalty under A. G. Bakikhanov’s supervision.

²⁰ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 351.

In 1841 Akhundov became the chief translator and six years later he received a military rank, as a colonel in the Russian army, although he had never fought in any military campaigns.²¹ In Tiflis, Akhundov met a significant number of Muslim, Georgian, and Russian intellectuals who profoundly influenced his philosophical and political development: A. G. Bakikhanov (1794–1847), a poet, historian, and diplomat; Khachatur Abovian (1809–1848), the Armenian teacher, ethnographer, and historian; Aleksandr Chavchavadze (1786–1846), the Georgian writer and poet; Giorgi Eristavi (1811–1864), the Georgian playwright, director, and actor; Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt (1819–1892), a German poet who popularized Mirza Shafi Vazekh’s poetry in Europe; and two Iranian princes, thinkers, and diplomats, Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar ud-Dovle and Mirza Jalal ud-Din ud-Dovle.²²

The literary influence of Russian writers, like A. S. Pushkin and M. V. Lermontov, and personal interconnection with political exiles, such as A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, Ia. P. Polonskii, A. Odoevskii, and T. Lada-Zablotskii, introduced Azerbaijani intellectuals to the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1846, Mirza Shafi, Akhundov, Bakikhanov, Abovian, Chavchavadze, and others organized a society called *Divan-i Aqil, The Society of Reason* in Tiflis, where they discussed their views on the cultural development of Transcaucasia within the Russian Empire and denounced the Islamic world as an unenlightened.²³ During the meetings society members discussed the works of European philosophers, and such discussions influenced Akhundov’s worldview. Akhundov acknowledged that European philosophy, particularly the writings of John Hume, John Stuart Mill, Voltaire, Henry T. Buckle,

²¹ D. Dzhafarov, *M. F. Akhundov: Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1962), 21–23.

²² Dzhafarov, *M. F. Akhundov*, 190–192.

²³ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 295.

Ernest Renan, and the works of the Swiss economist Jean Charles Leonard de Sismondi, formatted his thoughts on the ultimate triumph of science over religion.²⁴

A critical part of his worldview was an awareness that harmful Islamic practices can be eliminated through the abolition of Arabic script.²⁵ In 1857, Akhundov wrote *Alifba-i Jadid, The New Alphabet*, in which he argued that Arabic script was the principal cause of the high rate of illiteracy among Arabs, Iranians, and Turks, and this was the major factor that kept Muslims ignorant. He stated that its abolition and the introduction of Latin script would simplify learning of the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages and would substantially increase the rate of literacy among Muslim people. He provided his personal experience as an example of the disadvantages of the Arabic alphabet: despite the best efforts of his mother's uncle, *akhund* Alaskar, it took him four years to learn reading alone.²⁶ In 1863 Akhundov travelled to Istanbul to convince the Ottoman government, which introduced several reforms to modernize Muslim society, to adopt his proposed alphabet. There, he met the leading figures of the *Tanzimat Era*, the prime minister, Fuad Pasha, the minister of the Foreign Relationship, Ali Pasha, and Mehmet Munif Pasha, the head of the Ottoman Scientific Society.²⁷ The Ottoman officials agreed that the Arabic script suffered from deficiencies and that its reformation would not violate Islamic norms, but postponed its implementation.²⁸

²⁴ M. F. Akhundov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia* (Baku: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk AzSSR, 1953), 187–194.

²⁵ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 9–16.

²⁶ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 4.

²⁷ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 77–85.

²⁸ Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 83.

In 1873, Akhundov introduced the Russian Imperial officials to his project which aimed to replace Arabic script with a new alphabet based on Latin characters, with some Cyrillic letters, that better matched the Turkic phonetics and would enlighten the Azeri Muslims:

In striving to replace the outdated Islamic alphabet with a Latin one I pursue one aim: I want to carve a way to education, science, enlightenment, and civilization for people regardless of their social status and gender. One day all people, men and women, will become literate and civilized. We must put an end to our backward position behind the European nations in culture and knowledge. For this aim we must abandon the Arabic script and invent an alphabet close to our language and pronunciation.²⁹

Thus, Akhundov pointed out that the problem was not just a simple replacement of one script by another. There was a more fundamental task: to develop a system of schools and cultural institutions for Transcaucasian Muslims with compulsory education for children of both genders aged nine to fifteen.³⁰ He believed that the Latin alphabet was a vital part of secularization and would free the people from backward Islamic clergy and help in finding a place among the advanced European peoples. Akhundov argued that Islamic culture always contradicted science. He claimed that science gave people the right knowledge about nature and society, while religion was the world of fabulous fictions that had little to do with real life, and even disorientated people:

Our greatest mistake is that we always mix these two domains: science and faith. Our *mullahs*, Islamic clergy, teach us that if you know sciences, it means that you have no faith.³¹

Akhundov was also the first to shape the discourse about the need for a Muslim cultural revival and moved it from the pages of his literary works to the pages of a newly-established independent media. This innovation brought more people to the debates and gave birth to Azerbaijani journalism.

²⁹ Akhundov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, 345.

³⁰ *Akinchi* 2, January 18, 1877. Akhundov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, 296.

³¹ Akhundov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, 199.

In 1875–1877, the first newspaper in the Azerbaijani language, *Akinchi*, *The Ploughman*, came to life. Its founder, Hasan bek Melikov Zardabi (1842–1907), promoted societal modernization through the introduction of the first secular press; the establishment of a national theater; he also demanded education for girls, and he advocated for the gradual reform of Islam. Zardabi did not support Akhundov’s anti-Islamic position. Zardabi went against Akhundov’s idea of alphabet reformation, claiming that this would be a direct road to breaking traditional ties with the Islamic world, particularly Iran and those Azerbaijanis who stayed there after the Turkmanchai Treaty. During their debates Akhundov justified his position:

In every issue of your newspaper [*Akinchi*] Zardabi tells us, “Muslims, study sciences, study sciences...”. Incredibly good... but tell us, where can we study the sciences, who can teach us and in what language? We could study the sciences in towns, but there are no modern schools in towns, only Islamic *maktabs*. You call us to establish them but where can we find teachers? We have neither modern teachers nor up-to-date textbooks in the Arabic language. All of Anatolia is totally illiterate. The whole of Iran is illiterate... I see the reason for this; it is difficult for people whose language is not Arabic, but Turkish or Persian, to study in alien Arabic script.³²

Zardabi was not only the first who issued a newspaper in the Azerbaijani language, but he was also the first who organized Western-style theater in 1873 as the means to propagandize the reforms. Ironically, the first play staged was the play of his ideological opponent, M. F. Akhundov. That play, *Haji Qara*, described in a satirical manner the blind adherence of a well-off peasant to Islamic norms of conduct that he had to follow under the strict supervision of the *mullah*. However, this devotion left him deceived and poor. Zardabi believed that staging such plays at the theater would be a powerful message to enlighten people.³³ This and other cultural novelties, however, met strong opposition from the radical clergy who campaigned among commoners not to attend

³²*Akinchi* 2, January 18, 1877.

³³*Akinchi* 1, July 22, 1875.

this “satanic performance.”³⁴ In 1914, the editors of the journal *Mir Islama, World of Islam*, explained the roots of this opposition:

In the mid-nineteenth century the Muslim intelligentsia of the Caucasus consisted of *beks*, *khans* and *aghas* who were brought up in the spirit of Islamic conservatism and strict criticism towards people of lower classes and different origin. Those people considered Zardabi’s activity as a threat to the societal order on account of his liberal views, his popularization of the native language, his criticism of their agenda to keep peasants ignorant and humble. They also found a threat in the name of the newspaper, *Akinchi*, The Ploughman, that they assumed prioritized the needs of peasantry above the needs of aristocracy. The priests did not welcome the newspaper and theatre either, for the alleged imitation of the Europeans, and thus, the destruction of the traditional bases of Islamic society.³⁵

However, despite this criticism periodicals issued in the Azerbaijani language continued to be published, because they connected Muslim reformists both in Russia and the Ottoman Empire to one another. They became the platform to express the discourse of reform ideas among Muslims of the Turkic-speaking world, the one that also experienced a period of cultural reformation through the introduction of independent media in the Turkic language and a new type of education.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, Azerbaijani thinkers, like their Muslim Tatar counterparts from Crimea and the Volga region, became heavily engaged in debates on reconciling European culture with Islam. Islam as a language of communication, which reflected a system of shared values of the Muslim world, was not easily abandoned. If some reformers wanted to revise this relationship others planned to eliminate it from modern society and published their arguments in contemporary periodicals.

³⁴ *Akinchi* 1, July 22, 1875.

³⁵ “Pervye musul’manskie gazety na Kavkaze,” *Mir Islama* 12, 1914.



Figure 3. From left to right: Ismail bek Gasprinski, Hasan bek Zardabi, and Alimardan bek Topchibashev, Baku, 1907. AAKFD photo.

Since the mid-1890s, some Azeri men of letters, such as the brothers Seiid and Jalal Unsi zade, Ahmed bek Agayev, Ali bek Hussein zade, and others advocated for traditional Muslim culture. They called for rational interpretation of Islamic rules and argued for the preservation of true Islamic culture free from assimilation by the Western world. In 1894, Teimur Bairamalibekov, a well-known journalist and enlightener, showed in his article entitled *Koran i Magometanstvo*, *The Koran and Mohammedism*, that in Islam, like in all other religions, there were two domains: the spiritual, and a code of civic laws. He stated that the second one should be a changing domain reflecting real-life needs. However, religion remained the cornerstone for societal transformation:

We need to look at the Christian faith, whose followers adjusted their doctrines to their societal needs through the reformation since the sixteenth century. Our backwardness is based on a late awakening to the need to modify religious codes of conduct to lifetime demands.³⁶

In 1899, Akhmed bek Agayev maintained that it was a mistake to consider Islam as an enemy to progress. He argued that true Islam and true Muslims did not exist without education and

³⁶ T. Bairamalibekov, "Koran i Magometanstvo," *Novoe Obozreniie*, February 16, 1894.

enlightenment; enlightenment and Islam are two interconnected philosophies.³⁷ This group of modernizers found support from Ismail Gasprinski, a prominent leader who advanced the cultural transformation of Russian Muslims among Crimean and Volga Tatars. Gasprinski claimed that the statements to completely abandon Islam were harmful for Muslims because they destroyed every pillar of their faith and history.³⁸

Opponents of the moderate and traditionalist views of A. Agayev and T. Bairamalibekov were S. Mehmandarov, Muhammedaga Shakhtakhtinskii, Hussein Minasazov, Dzhaliil Mamedkulizade, Nariman Narimanov, and Mirza Sabir.³⁹ They believed in secularism, criticized the existing societal position, calling it backward, and tried to improve the unenlightened position of Transcaucasian Muslims by rejecting outdated Islamic practices. In 1892, S. Mehmandarov, in one of his articles published in *Novoie Obozreniie*, stated:

How can Islam, with its draconian laws from the seventh century invented by the backward Bedouins of the desert, encourage Muslims from lands with rich pre-Islamic culture? Islamic doctrine is based on the essence of inequality between tribes, nations, social status, and gender.⁴⁰

Moreover, he argued that Koranic dogmas are in contradiction with the common sense of the modern world.⁴¹ Such statements fueled discussion about the role of religion in modern society.

The debate over the role of Islam and the degree to which Muslims should adopt Western culture in the process of societal reformation divided the Islamic priesthood as well. The progressive clergy such as Abdulsalam Akhund zade, the Transcaucasian mufti Huseyn-effendi Gaibov, Molla Muhammed Pishnamaz zade, and Molla Abdurrahim Talybov, stood for the

³⁷ A. Agayev, "Islam i progress," *Kaspii*, January 10, 1899.

³⁸ I. Gasprinskii, "Po povodu statei gospodina Mehmandarova (pis'mo v redaktsiiu)," *Novoe Obozreniie*, April 14, 1894.

³⁹ Please note that some personalities' first names were not mentioned in the original sources. So, I will use only their surnames in this work. Where I have the full names found in the original sources, I will provide them.

⁴⁰ S. Mehmandarov, "Prichiny otstalosti musul'man," *Novoe Obozreniie*, December 5, 1892.

⁴¹ S. Mehmandarov, "Kak byt'?" *Novoe Obozreniie*, February 11, 1894.

reformation of classic Islamic canons and the promotion of secular education.⁴² The traditionalist clergy, in contrast, whose leader was Akhund Abuturab, declared that the happiness and progress of Muslims could only be reached through religion. In 1906, Abuturab expressed his opinion in the newspaper *Hayat*:

Regardless of the amount of knowledge and skills the atheist person has, he cannot enter the kingdom of humanity and culture. Only Islam opens the doors to this domain. Only the Koran arms people with knowledge about good and evil, brings spiritual satisfaction and protects people from temptation and seductions. Western culture is harmful for Muslims who have a unique history and path within human civilization.⁴³

Such arguments gave the reform-minded intellectuals a chance to accuse the Muslim clergy of backwardness and xenophobia. Namely, Firudin Kocharli, a prominent public figure and a journalist, strongly criticized Abuturab's statements on the "Muslims' unique path in history" and his warning to keep far from Western influence.⁴⁴ Other famous public personalities, namely Mamedkulizade and Nemanzade, criticized Muslim *Shia* clergy, denouncing them as pillars of immorality and cruelty, and as the men who were incapable of thinking beyond outdated religious writings. As Kocharli expressed in 1907:

If a person does not gain culture and compassion through sciences and art, he will never acquire them from Islamic practices and *Sharia* norms. It is literature and science that enlightened humanity in their notion of empathy and human progress.⁴⁵

Another thinker who claimed the need to reform Islam and modernize society was M. Shakhtakhtinskii. He expressed his ideas in a collection of essays issued in Saint-Petersburg in

⁴² *Kaspii*, February 23, 1905.

⁴³ "Medeniyet heyatinin muassir hadiselerine, Axund Abuturab ile ifade edilen, Islam din xadimlerinin fikirleri," *Hayat*, 106, May 17, 1906.

⁴⁴ F. Kocharlinskii, "Kakiie nauki nam nuzhny?," *Zakavkaz'ie* 72, March 29, 1907.

⁴⁵ F. Kocharlinskii, "Kakiie nauki nam nuzhny?," *Zakavkaz'ie* 72, March 29, 1907.

1909. In one of his articles, he criticized Islam as the main obstruction on the road to social progress:

Islam has become an embodiment of social stagnation for its imposition of theological dogmas on Muslims, depriving them of the establishment of secular laws different from *Sharia*, and killing in them freedom of choice. Muslims must realize that even Europeans had wrong scientific ideas, arguing in the past that the sun rotates around the Earth, but they overcame this ignorance with science and literacy. Thus, like Europeans, we can defeat our religious prejudices to gain a realistic vision of the world and public order.⁴⁶

The Azeri intellectual, Rashid bek Efendiiev, voiced another dangerous factor that prevented the spread of modern knowledge among Muslims since the end of the 1870s. He pointed out the number of self-appointed *Muridists sheikhs*, of Sunni denomination of Islam, who were the leaders of the Muslim community from the Northern Caucasus.⁴⁷ Those *sheikhs* promoted religious fanaticism against all kinds of secular education and enlightenment.⁴⁸ Like Efendiiev, the essayist M. Mahmudbekov also acknowledged that the *Muridists sheikhs* had gained popularity in Azerbaijan because many local Muslims were disappointed in the local *Shia* clergy for perceived corruption of Islamic codes of conduct and thus sided with *Muridism*. In this situation, the Azerbaijani reformers felt a duty to spread modern knowledge in opposition to the reactionary religious influence of the local priests supported by Iranian *Shia* clerics and Sunni *Muridists*. Both factions allegedly prevented Muslims of the Russian empire from joining progressive civilization.⁴⁹

As the Azeri men of letters discussed different paths to advance their society to the level of Western progressive civilization, they began to define the notion of “culture” and “civilization”

⁴⁶ M. Shakhtakhtinskii, “Krizis musul’ manskoi zhiznesposobnosti,” *Turetskii Sbornik* (Saint-Petersburg, 1909), 104.

⁴⁷ *Muridism* was the movement in the Northern Caucasus against the Russian invasion. Its leaders, also, claimed the return to pure Islam that prevailed before the sectarian split between *Sunni* and *Shia* denominations.

⁴⁸ R. Efendiiev, “Vozniknoveniie seikh-abdinskogo miuridizma v Geokchaiskom uezde Bakinskoi gubernii,” *Novoe Obozreniie*, February 27, 1896.

⁴⁹ M. Mahmudbekov, “Miuridicheskaia sekta,” *Kaspii*, 271, 272, 281, 284, 1893.

within an Islamic paradigm. The modernists, particularly Hussein Minasazov, believed that “culture” is a universal criterion that is fundamental to all nations; however, “civilization” is ascribed only to advanced European nations:

Culture is the symbiosis of spiritual values produced by religion, science and art, important for moral and social relations among the people of one nation. Civilization is the combination of material values, legal and civil norms that allow nations to develop and succeed. All these qualities belong to prosperous European civilizations.⁵⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century, the new cohort of intellectuals, Mamed Emin Rasulzade and S. Mehmandarov, continued the discussion about getting culturally closer to the European world while simultaneously preserving some specific Azerbaijani cultural traditions – language, and to some degree, religion.⁵¹ S. Mehmandarov was among the first to propose the establishment of European-type schools and the abolition of women’s isolation that had been maintained by patriarchal tradition to keep Transcaucasian Muslim women veiled and publicly invisible. He considered this the best method to embrace Western civilization. Mehmandarov also believed that this method would awaken all Muslim society and not only some individuals who received training in Western educational centres.⁵² Some reformers proposed another path: to focus on Western philosophy that, in their opinion, guided the European public to more progressive human existence. In 1915, the essayist Minasazov compared the role of religion, particularly Islam, and European philosophy in the process of societal developments. He concluded that Western ways of thinking were more beneficial because of their progressive character:

Descartes developed his ideas on Aristotle’s views, Locke grew on Descartes and Kant expanded Locke’s world-view. In this way they, unlike the Islamic conservative scholars, revolutionized the scientific way of thinking and social life.⁵³

⁵⁰ H. Minasazov, “Islam i kul’tura,” *Kavkazskoye slovo*, July 2, 1915.

⁵¹ *Achig Sioz*, January 30, 1916.

⁵² S. Mehmandarov, “Protiv musul’manskoi rutiny,” *Novoe Obozreniie*, December 8, 1894.

⁵³ H. Minasazov, “Islam i kul’tura,” *Kavkazskoye slovo*, July 2, 1915.

However, some reformers believed that Muslim culture could enrich progressive Western civilization as well. Mamed Emin Rasalzade, a prominent intellectual and a political leader, claimed that civilization was the combination of different cultures that contributed to accordance with their abilities. Thus, the marginalization of any culture was the death of that culture and consequently of that nation.⁵⁴ He also considered Muslim isolation from the rest of the world as the direct outcome of Islamic stagnation implemented by a conservative clergy keen to preserve their own position in the Muslim community.⁵⁵ Rasalzade, like other enlighteners, appealed to Western philosophers, like Schopenhauer, Goethe, Gutenberg, Luther, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, as high authorities whose theories gave the European people a sense of freedom and independence that he thought was impossible to develop within Islamic spiritual doctrine.⁵⁶ Hence, the Azerbaijani European-educated reformers who admired Western civilization believed that the only correct path to modernize their community was through the adoption and use of Western philosophical and scientific principles on Muslim soil.

The penetration of European values into traditional Muslim culture, however, often provoked cultural and generational tensions. Among the evidence is correspondence between M. T. Aliyev,⁵⁷ a student of the Russian Petrovsko-Razumovskoi Academy, and his teacher Gasan bek Zardabi, the founder of the first Azerbaijani newspaper *Akinci* (1875–1877). In these letters, Aliyev complained that his father considered him a lost man, *itkin adam*, and an infidel, *giaour*, for his adoration of Western lifestyles and for refusing to follow proper Muslim patriarchal traditions. The correspondence demonstrates that the tensions between father and son were so great

⁵⁴ M. E. Rasalzade, *Sbornik proizvedeniia i pisem* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Flinta, 2010), 26.

⁵⁵ Rasalzade, *Sbornik proizvedeniia i pisem*, 156–159.

⁵⁶ Rasalzade, *Sbornik proizvedeniia i pisem*, 16.

⁵⁷ Please note that Aliyev's first name, like those of some other personalities, was not mentioned in the original sources. So, I will use only his surname in this work.

that the elder Aliyev opposed his son's return to Azerbaijan from Russia and even wished for his death, before shame could spread through all the family.⁵⁸ Aliyev also complained about depression and the deterioration of his health as the result of these family issues. Unfortunately, there is neither any evidence as to what his teacher suggested for him to do in this situation, nor information about his future.

Rashid bek Akhundov (1854–1909), a graduate of the universities in Brussels and Paris, also went through many hardships and was similarly ostracized by his traditional community for his refusal to maintain proper Islamic and traditional practices. His suffering increased particularly after the death of his father, Mirza Fatali Akhundov, who was a prominent reformer of Azerbaijani alphabet and went against dogmatic Islamic practices, in 1878. The Muslim clergy of Tiflis refused to perform the proper funeral ceremony in accordance with Islamic norms for M. F. Akhundov's anticlericalism.⁵⁹ Eventually, feeling as though a pariah and being in a state of depression after years of police surveillance for his alleged connections to French socialists, Rashid bek committed suicide in 1909.⁶⁰

These real facts about the problematic position of the young men trained in the European style within the patriarchal society inspired Yousif Vezirov, the Azerbaijani writer and enlightener, to write a story entitled *Kemal* in 1907.⁶¹ It is a story about a family patriarch who sent his son, Kemal, to study at a Russian university. However, on his deathbed he changed his mind and asked his son to return home and become the family head in the traditional way. The father provided several arguments to convince his son to interrupt his education, claiming that during the good old

⁵⁸ "Pis'mo M. T. Aliyeva G.B. Zardabi," (August 12, 1877) ARIM [Azerbaijan Republic Institute of Manuscripts], f. 3, o. 1, d. 100, l. 1-2.

⁵⁹ D. Dzhafarov, *M. F. Akhundov*, 202)

⁶⁰ F. Qasımzadə, *M. F. Axundovun həyat və yaradıcılığı* (Baku: AzGiz, 1962), 150.

⁶¹ Yusif Mirbaba oğlu Vezirov, Chamanzaminli, (12 September 1887, Shusha- 3 January 1943, Sukhobezvodnoie, GULAG camp); Vezirov, *Moi dnevniki*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, ll. 151–157.

days they all lived happily without any science. He blamed diabolical books brought by infidels, and sorrows created by young people who had forgotten their proper places and stopped believing in God. Kemal returned home but could not accept maintaining a traditional lifestyle. Kemal complained that his family criticized him for his “new way of thinking shaped in the Russian schools, for wearing *giaour*’s clothes, doing morning exercises and taking a promenade in the evening.”⁶² His reluctance to return to a traditional life posed conflict with the family and the whole local Muslim society, and led to his suicide.⁶³ Thus, the absolute adherence to European norms of living often produced conflict between its followers and their traditional society.

For the generation of graduates from non-Muslim traditional training centres, the Russian language became *lingua franca* in expressing their identity publicly as well as privately in diaries and correspondence. Yousif Vezirov used Russian to express his feelings and thoughts in his diaries of 1907–1909 that reminisced about his student life in Baku, Ashgabat, and Saint-Petersburg.⁶⁴ However, the acceptance of Russian culture by young Azerbaijani men did not bring them the absolute recognition of Russian society either. Vezirov, despite his pro-European worldview, felt, nevertheless, like an outsider in the Russian community. He recalled the instances when groups of Russian students and young ladies ignored him for his “otherness” and those situations led to his loss of self-confidence.⁶⁵ Like Vezirov, Rashid bek Akhundov also had such an experience. In 1875, he wrote to his father, M. F. Akhundov:

Russians, even those who were born in the Caucasus and educated here, behave in superior ways not by their cultural or intellectual qualities, but by their arrogance toward us, the Caucasian Muslims.⁶⁶

⁶² Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 156.

⁶³ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 152–154.

⁶⁴ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183.

⁶⁵ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 69.

⁶⁶ “Pis’mo Rashid beka Akhundova k M. F. Akhundovu” (February 24, 1875) ARIM f.2, o. 1, d. 142, l.1.

Such feelings of being in an underprivileged position and not culturally equal led to a realization of the barrier that separated Muslims from Russian European society and stimulated these and other educated young men to refine their views about societal backwardness. They began to propagandize ideas about taking important steps to improve the position of Transcaucasian Muslims through enlightenment. In 1907, Vezirov recalled in his diaries his correspondence with M. G. Mirtagiev regarding the required actions toward societal development:

All those who went to the European Universities had to take a sacred mission – to bring knowledge to our nation, because this is exactly what our nation needs. Our humble nation puts great hopes in its students as the future defenders of its rights, faith and justice.⁶⁷

Thus, despite the strong opposition that many intelligent young Azeri men often faced from their traditional families and communities, nevertheless, they were inspired to serve their people to create an advanced nation, *millat*, by accepting the latest European scientific and artistic achievements. However, they debated just how much they should accept, and their views fluctuated from moderate to extremely enthusiastic. One of the leading intellectuals, A. Aidamirov, stated that it was dangerous to follow Western culture blindly because injustice dominated among the Europeans as well. He proposed taking on only their achievements in scientific knowledge and using them for the benefit of the *millat*, the new nation.⁶⁸

However, unlike these broad-minded young people, there were many others who only focused on the materialistic aspects of Europeanism: borrowing the Western type of home furniture, like tables and chairs, along with fashionable clothing such as cravats and high hats. In 1916, Azeri writer Tagi Shahbazi Simurg (1892–1938), in his novel *Alexander Evgen'evich* introduced an image of a typical young man of that period: a graduate of the Russian university

⁶⁷ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik* (September 21, 1907) ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 125.

⁶⁸ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 120.

who abandoned his traditional manners, original language, and name, Alihuseyn bek, and instead took the Russian name Alexander Evgen'evich. This man justified his deed by arguing that this tactic made it easier to be admitted into Russian society. Moreover, he stated that European ladies preferred to interact with a European man rather than with a “wild savage.”⁶⁹ In this novel, Shahbazi criticized such principles, pointing out that this character, like many others, chose to satisfy his personal ambitions instead of using the knowledge and position he had gained to enlighten the people. Shahbazi concluded that, for truly progressive young people, Europeanization meant not simply changing clothes, manners, and the possession of material goods, but working for the benefit of their people. Such statements promoted the widespread idea of creating a new and advanced nation, a *millat*, through the proposed reformation of Muslim society by introducing modern education.

Bringing Education to Young Muslim Men

Like a mother who pays no attention to the scream of her child during bath time for the benefit of her health, so we must ignore the voices of those ill-willed conservatives in our struggle to make our children literate.
G. Zardabi, *Kaspîi*, February 15, 1900.⁷⁰

The Muslim reformers of the late Russian empire considered the transformation of elementary education as the best and fastest way to modernize Russian Muslim society in accordance with what they imagined to be the standards of the civilized world. They aimed to reform the *maktabs*, the Islamic institutions of elementary education. The reformers concentrated

⁶⁹ Tagi Shahbazi Simurg, *Sechilmish eserleri* (Baku: Yazıçhı, 1983), 56.

⁷⁰ G. Zardabi, “Novaia shkol’naia sistema v Amerike, soedeniaiuschaia umstvennoe razvitie s ruchnym trudom,” *Kaspîi*, February 15, 1900.

their efforts on remodeling the *maktabs* according to new pedagogical methods. They hoped that the generation graduating from these new schools would not only read and write in their native Turkic language but would also acquire basic scientific knowledge and later would develop an interest in learning at modern Western universities. They believed that this much-needed knowledge would lead all Russian Muslims and their modernized new *millat* to progress.

The reform of traditional education came because of disappointment with archaic training systems that they believed did not provide the skills that were necessary for success in the modern world. The crucial factors contributing to these alleged backward positions were an absence of unified teaching methods in *maktabs* and *madrassahs*, as well as the practice of assembling male students in one class, without consideration for their age and level of literacy.⁷¹ Another obstacle to effective education was a teaching method based on memorizing the names of the letters of the Arabic alphabet which led to unconscious reading and memorization of selective verses from the Koran. *Maktabs* provided knowledge about Islam, the history of Muslim rulers, calligraphy, and basic reading and writing in the Persian and Arabic languages. The instructors did not have a salary; their income depended on voluntary payment from the parents of *shakirds*, students. The *maktabs* could function in mosques and private houses of the priests or wealthy notables. By the end of the nineteenth century in Baku province, with a population of 826,716 people, there were 245 *maktabs* with 4,915 students. In Elisavetpol' province, with its population of 878,415 people, there were 268 *maktabs* with 4000 students.⁷² Traditionally these centres provided education only for male students.

⁷¹ *Maktabs* were designed for male students 7–16 years old, and *madrassah* for male students 16–30 years old.

⁷² A. Zakharov, *Narodnoe uchenie u Zakavkazskikh tatar: Sbornik materialov dlia opisaniya mestnostej i plemen Kavkaza* (Tiflis: Tipografiia Kancelarii Glavnonachal'stvuiushhego grazhdanskoi chasti na Kavkaze, 1890), 9.

The first attempt to reform the Muslim educational system came from the Russian Imperial authorities who aimed to promote state interests by decreasing the Islamic clergy's influence and fostering the emergence of a pro-Russian cultural elite.⁷³ The promotion of Russian-Tatar schools for the Muslim gentry began in 1847, the year of the establishment of the first four-year elementary schools in different cities in Azerbaijan as an alternative to traditional *maktabs*. The primary goal of those schools was to convey to the local wealthy nobility practical knowledge of the Russian language that would enable them to perform commercial and administrative services within the empire. Also, such program of schooling aimed to gain trust from the Muslim community to send their boys to study at these new schools that provided basic literacy in the Turkic language and in Islamic studies.

On November 22, 1873, the Russian Imperial Ministry of Public Enlightenment introduced "The Rules for Schools of the Caucasus District School Board" which gave the right for individuals of the Islamic faith to open Russian-Tatar secondary schools for Muslim students using municipal funds and private donations.⁷⁴ In 1885, the Ministry of Public Enlightenment issued a decree allowing Muslim people to establish and to teach in Russian-Tatar private elementary schools.⁷⁵ Earlier, in 1874, the Imperial government had excluded *maktabs* and *madrassahs* from the formal jurisdiction of the public school directorate.⁷⁶ Despite some criticism from local people over this reform, many Azeri Muslims welcomed this innovation for two reasons: first, they argued that through the absorption of the Russian language Muslims would gain access to Western education and culture. Second, the acquisition of Russian knowledge and skills would allow Muslims to

⁷³ N. Tairzade, *Chislennost' i sostav uchashhihsya russkikh uchebnykh zavedeniy Azerbaidzhana v 40-50-e gody 19 veka* (Baku: Izvestiya AN Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR, , 1964), 12. N. Tairzade, *O musul'manskikh uchilishhakh v Azerbaidzhane v 40-e i 50-e godakh 19 veka: Materialy po istorii Azerbaidzhana* (Baku: AzGiz, 1962), 143.

⁷⁴ "Tsirkuliari ob obrazovaniii u Zakavkazskikh musul'man," ARDTA [Azerbaijan Republic State Historical Archive] f. 309, o. 2, d. 944, ll. 3-4.

⁷⁵ "Tsirkuliari ob obrazovaniii u Zakavkazskikh musul'man," ARDTA f. 309, o. 2, d. 944, l. 10.

⁷⁶ "Tsirkuliari ob obrazovaniii u Zakavkazskikh musul'man," ARDTA f. 309, o. 2, d. 944, l. 1-2.

protect the interests of their community more effectively within the Russian empire.⁷⁷ Thus, they demanded that the Russian authorities open more primary and secondary schools because of the benefits of a modern education and lifestyle.⁷⁸

The statistics from the 1897 all-Russian imperial survey prove that the non-Russian peoples of the empire had the lowest literacy rates. For instance, the literacy rate for both genders among Russian people was 22.9 percent, while the rate of the population of the Caucasus, including Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians, was 12.4 percent. The Central Asian region had 5.3 percent educated people.⁷⁹ In Azerbaijan, in the Baku province alone, there were 826,716 people. Among the 83.32 percent of Azeri Muslims, the literacy rate was 5.6 percent, while 37.6 percent of Russians, and 24.4 percent of Armenians were literate.⁸⁰

Zardabi was the first to voice the problem that Muslims fearing Russification did not allow their children to go to Russian schools and in this way left Muslim children without any education at all. In *Akinchi* and other local printing organs, he widely discussed the need for the introduction of secular schools using the Azerbaijani language as the only means to overcome backwardness and to modernize Muslim society. He stood for common education and for the organization of such schools for the lower classes, the most illiterate part of Muslim society.⁸¹ Zardabi wrote that literacy should even be introduced forcefully and that the combination of mental development with vocational training would prove the best method for the formation of the modern, intelligent man of strong will that was needed for a new nation, *millat*, culturally equal among other nations.⁸²

⁷⁷ Shakhhtakhtinskii, "Shkol'naia zhizn' u musul'man," *Kavkaz* 90, 1882.

⁷⁸ *Tiflisskii Listok* 269, 1900.

⁷⁹ N. A. Troinitskii, *Naseleniie imperii po perepisi 28-go ianvaria 1897 goda po uezdam*, 308.

⁸⁰ N. A. Troinitskii, *Naseleniie imperii po perepisi 28-go ianvaria 1897 goda po uezdam, Bakinskaia Guberniia*, 9.

⁸¹ Melikova, *Biografiia Hasan beka Melikova-Zardabi*, 33.

⁸² G. Dzhinoridze, "Hasan bek Melikov," *Kaspii*, November 29, 1907.

In Azerbaijan, intellectuals who gained training at the Russian educational centres became leaders in the introduction of education reform. They were the active men of letters trained in engineering, trade, medicine, pedagogy, music composition, and other fields, and who were also fluent in Azeri, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Russian, and some other European languages. Those intellectuals appealed to the native wealthy bourgeois for financial support to introduce the new-method education that would increase the literacy of their people, particularly in the Turkic language. Remarkably, Russian authorities did not oppose the civic initiative in establishing new-method schools. Since the 1870s, the native independent press helped to convince the Muslim community of the benefit of this new type of education.⁸³

In 1879, Muhammedaga Shakhtakhtinskii (1846–1931), a graduate of Leipzig and Sorbonne universities, introduced his ideas on cultural modernization through the reformation of the Arabic alphabet in the Russian-language press, *Kavkaz*, *Tiflisskii Listok*, *Novoe Obozreniie*, that circulated in among Transcaucasian Muslim communities at the end of the 1890s.⁸⁴ In 1899, he became the chief editor of Russian-language newspaper *Kaspii* where he, along with other reformers, voiced the need to introduce new schools and to apply new methods in pedagogy. He also strove for the separation of religion from education, arguing that theological worldviews and archaic thinking were the main factors in Muslim backwardness. In his statements Shakhtakhtinskii articulated the purpose of the reforms: overcoming Muslim backwardness was the means to eliminate patriarchal traditions, to raise the cultural level of his people, and to develop a modern society that would be equal with the allegedly progressive Russian society.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Akinchi* 11, June 11, 1876.

⁸⁴ M. Shakhtakhtinskii, "Ob uluchsheniiu alfavita i obrazovaniia u Musul'man," *Novoe Obozreniie*, June 13, 1879.

⁸⁵ M. Shakhtakhtinskii, "Shkol'naia zhizn' u musul'man," *Kavkaz* 90, 1882.

Seiid Azim Shirvani (1835–1888), was a poet and pedagogue. Shirvani founded the *majlis*, literary society, *majlis Beyt-ul-Shafa*, in Shamakhi. The *majlis* proposed an evolutionary change in the local Muslim community through the acquisition of Western knowledge and its application to Islamic values.⁸⁶ He believed in overcoming the community's decay through the introduction of new education that would give rise to a new generation of Muslim leaders who would put an end to an unenlightened existence.⁸⁷ Another educator, Firudin bek Kocharli (1863–1920), claimed that Islam was not an obstacle to the progress of science and enlightenment:

The Koran does not forbid Muslims from developing intellectually; it does not prioritize illiteracy over knowledge or prohibit Muslims from studying in any language or from being an enlightened person in the modern way. The Koran does not propagate any intolerance, immorality, or any inhuman concepts.⁸⁸

The rhetoric on the reformation of education prompted the emergence of the first new-method school in 1875. The new-method schools were different from traditional *maktabs*: they functioned outside the mosques and were run by people who did not belong to the class of priesthood. The new-method of education provided literacy using the phonetic method of teaching instead of a letter-based method; a letter was pronounced not as a syllable but as a sound. This method accelerated the learning process. The new-method schools, unlike the *maktabs*, divided students by age and grouped them into classes that were equipped with desks, maps, charts, and graphs. The new-method schools abolished the corporal punishment that had been the key feature of the training process at *maktab*. M. F. Akhundov denounced the education at *maktab* as harmful for several reasons:

⁸⁶ *Akinchi* 6, 1875; 8, 10, 11, 1876; 13, 16, 1877.

⁸⁷ F. Kocharli, "Shirvani va giandzhialar," *Akinchi* 5, 1877.

⁸⁸ F. Kocharlinskii, "Iz istorii islama," *Novoe Obozreniie*, August 15, 1894.

Educating children by caning and slapping them means to destroy their morality, to make them ill-natured and kill their kindness, free spirit, and determination. Shame on us, every *maktab* in our land has the *felakke*.⁸⁹



Figures 4. The punishment of schoolchildren in Tatar, Azeri, schools. A. Mishon, Baku, 1890s. AAKFD photo. Image from the journal *Molla Nasreddin*, 1906.

Another key aspect of improving the training process was the modification of textbooks to address the demands of real life. In 1831, in his work *Takhsibul-ahlak, Correction of Moral Values*, Bakikhanov complained about the low standard of textbooks that showed poor language skills, character, contents, and did not match children’s psychology.⁹⁰ Many reformers also remarked that traditional textbooks were so complex that many teachers themselves could not understand the long and disconnected texts. As F. Kocharli noticed:

The main problem in Muslim society is the lack of connection between real life and education; both go by their separate ways. They did not know anything about each other, unaware of each other’s needs, worries and sorrows.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Akhundov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, 296.

Felakke, a specially designed tool to deliver corporal punishment: a log, to keep the student still while he underwent beating over the heels, and the set of sticks.

⁹⁰ A. G. Bakikhanov, *Sochineniia, zapiski, pis'ma* (Baku: Elm, 1983), 12–14.

⁹¹ F. Kocharli, *Sechelmish eserleri* (Baku: Maarif, 1963), 201.

High demand for quality training materials prompted the emergence of a textbook market for the new-method educational centres. The new-type educational literature for the new-method schools was the symbiosis of two cultures: Russian and Azerbaijani. The native teachers used the Russian language textbooks by K. D. Ushinskii, *Rodnoie Slovo, Native Word*, and for Mathematics, *The Collection of Arithmetic Problems* by V. A. Evtushevskii. For literature and social studies they used works written in the Azerbaijani language by native authors such as Fizuli, Sabir, Shirvani, S. A. Velibekov, R. Efendiiev, Abdulla Shaiq, M. Mahmudbekov, and Abbas Sahhat.⁹² To teach students their own language the modern educators produced works about Azeri phonetics and grammar: in 1890, S.M. Ganizade published a two volume textbook entitled *Istilahi Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani Dialect*. By 1922 the book had six editions. In 1893 and 1894, Ganizade introduced *Rus ve Turk Lugeti, Russian-Turkic Dictionary*, and *Rus va Turk Dilmanii, Russian-Turkic Phrasebook* to popularize the Russian language among Azeri population. Ganizade also wrote a Russian language textbook called *Rus Dilinin Muellemi, Russian Language Tutor*. In 1900, Ganizade, in collaboration with Ali Iskandar Dzhafar zade, published a Persian language textbook, *Kilidiedebiiat, The Key to Literature*. In 1899 Nariman Narimanov issued another textbook entitled *Turk-Azerbaijan Dilinin Muhteser Serf-Nehfi, A Concise Grammar of Turkic-Azerbaijani Language*, and a *Self-Tutorial on Russian Language*. This new-method pedagogical literature significantly increased literacy among schoolchildren and gained wide popularity because those pupils trained in the new schools could read and write in their mother tongue after six months and in Russian after twelve months of learning, while those who were educated in the old method could not write their own names and read even after a year of studying.⁹³

⁹² F. M. Hrutsesov, "Madzhlisnaia shkola v Shemakhe," *Kavkaz* 188, 1881. A. Zakharov, "Narodnoe uchenie u Zakavkazskikh tatar," 26–27.

⁹³ Nariman Narimanov, "O dostizheniakh novo-metodicheskikh shkol," *Hayat* 171, 1906.

The first new-method school in a rural area came to life in the Salahli village of Kazakh district, Elisavetpol province, in January of 1875. Its founder, T. Mamleiev, an ethnic Tatar from Kazan, opened this school for twenty-seven students, four of whom were from poor families and got education for free. The curriculum included Koranic studies, reading and writing in the Russian and Azerbaijani languages, arithmetic, geometry, and gymnastics.⁹⁴ The establishment of the first new-method educational centre in a big urban setting belongs to S. A. Shirvani, who opened the school in 1875 in Shamakhi city. The school lasted until the death of its founder in 1887.

In 1892, poet and wealthy merchant Muhammed Tagi Safarov Sidgi (1854–1903) established a new-method school, named *Akhtar*, in Ordubad city. In 1894, he opened another school named *Terbiie*.⁹⁵ In 1896, the state school board reorganized those schools into Russian-Tatar educational centres for their outstanding achievements in spreading literacy, and transferred both to fall under the jurisdiction of the directorate of public schools.⁹⁶ Since the mid-1880s, Sidgi also wrote several pedagogical books for the new-method curriculum. These included *Qizlara Hadiesi, A Gift for Girls*, and *Oglanlara Hadiesi, Present for Boys*. In the 1890s, he wrote a series of books called *Maktab Hekaielar, The School Stories*, which were the first non-religious literary works dedicated to young children in the Azerbaijani language. The series consisted of short moral stories about the school life *Maktabe davam, Go on to Study in School; Qezuchokh Ushaqin Hekaieti, The Story of a Diligent Child; Yalanchi Ushaq, The Liar Child; Sekhavetli Ushaq, The Generous Child*; and others. In 1882, Sidgi announced his ideas on new-method education in his work entitled *Heykeli Insane Bir Nazir, A Glance at the Man*, where he introduced an argument about the need to change the Arabic script into Latin. He stated that this measure would be an

⁹⁴ “V selenii Salakhly gorozhanin iz Kazani dlia musul’ manskikh detei otkryl shkolu i obuchaet ikh russkomu iazyku,” *Akinchi* 1, January 4, 1877.

⁹⁵ D. Mamedkulizade, *Sechilmish eserleri* (Baku: Yazich, 1963), 16.

⁹⁶ *Kavkazskii kalendar’ za 1897 god* (Tiflis, 1897), 98.

important step toward decreasing the power of corrupt clergy; it did not, however, discard the whole Muslim faith. He argued:

Why did the leader of the Muslim world (i.e., the Prophet Muhammad), divide science into secular and spiritual? Because he understood them as equal. Thus, it is not the religion of Islam, but the misinterpretation of corrupted priests, that brought to the Muslims ignorance in science and pitiful life.⁹⁷

Another new-method school operating since 1883 in Shusha was under the patronage of Safar Ali Velibekov (1861–1902). Velibekov popularized teaching in the Azerbaijani language and wrote, in 1888, the textbook *Vatan Dili, Language of the Motherland*. This school had twenty-five students. Velibekov was not the only one in Shusha promoting the benefits of the new method among *maktab* teachers.⁹⁸

Among progressive educators who embraced this methodology was Mir Movsum Navvab (1833–1918). The founder of the literary club *Majlis-i Faramushan*, he also opened libraries and reading rooms. In 1890, he established a non-mosque school. In 1899, to popularize his ideas, Navvab published the book *Nasikhat-name, Book of the Recommendations*, where he explained the outdated pedagogical traditions of religious schools.⁹⁹ In Lenkoran, Akhundov Mirza Ismail Gasir (1806–1900) opened a new method school, which in addition to the native language also taught Russian, Arabic, and modern sciences.¹⁰⁰ In September 1887, two Azerbaijani teachers, S. M. Ganiev (1866–1937) and H. I. Mahmudbekov (1864–1928), graduates of the *Aleksandreievskii Pedagogicheskii Institut, Pedagogical University named after Tsar Alexander*, and Teachers' Training Institute in Tiflis, founded a private Russian-Muslim school in Baku. Four years later, in September of 1891, they divided it into two secondary schools. Under Mahmudbekov's

⁹⁷ J. Ejvazov, *Mamed Tagi Sidgi* (Baku: Iazychi, 1986), 15.

⁹⁸ "O sostoianii Russko-Tatarskikh shkol v Zakavkaz'ie," ARDTA f. 309, o. 2, d. 944, l. 8.

⁹⁹ G. M. Akhmedov, *19-cu esrin Azerbaycan mektebi* (Baku: Maarif, 2000), 210–215.

¹⁰⁰ G. M. Akhmedov, *19-cu esrin Azerbaycan mektebi*, 342.

directorship there were thirty-five students, and under Ganievs's supervision, there were forty-four students.¹⁰¹ By 1901 there were ten Russian-Tatar schools with 2249 male students in Baku alone.¹⁰²

However, the new-method schools varied in size, organization, and permanency, and always depended on financial and material support from native philanthropists. There was a shortage of teachers as well. The agenda to have a secure system of secular education was realized only in Baku and its surroundings under the patronage of the oil magnate Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev. In 1908, Tagiev gave critical financial assistance to the establishment of *Neshr-i Maarif*, a philanthropic organization working to eliminate illiteracy among Transcaucasian Muslims. He paid tuition fees for the students at the Pedagogical educational centres along with their salaries when they became teachers employed by *Neshr-i Maarif*. As the *Charter of the Neshr-i Maarif* demonstrates, this organization used a different strategy to promote the new type of education. Unlike its proponents in the regions outside Baku who opened the brand-new *Jadid* schools and competed with the traditional centres, *Neshr-i Maarif* produced new-type teachers and supplied them to the traditional and government schools.¹⁰³ This strategy was part of the agenda to promote literacy in the Russian and Azerbaijani languages for all Muslim community members regardless of social status, age, and gender. Also, this project promoted Azerbaijani as the native language rather than Tatar.¹⁰⁴ This tactic did not meet opposition from the Ministry of Public Enlightenment, which continued to refer to those schools as the "Russian-Tatar" schools.

¹⁰¹ "O sostoianii Russko-Tatarskikh shkol v Zakavkaz'ie," ARDTA f. 309, o. 2, d. 944, l. 10.

¹⁰² "Bakinin rus-miusul'man mektəblərinin 25 illik," *Mekteb 21*, 1912.

¹⁰³ "Obshchestvo rasprostraneniia gramotnosti sredi musul'manskogo naseleniia Bakinskoi gubernii *Neshr-i Maarif*. ARDTA f. 312, o. 1, d. 39.

¹⁰⁴ This politics is illustrated in many petitions and correspondences with the state authorities about the society's mission. *Neshr-i Maarif*, ARDTA, f. 312, o.1, d. 6, l. 1–5. The *Neshr-i Maarif* leaders referred to themselves as Azerbaijanis and their language as Azeri Turkic. ARDTA, f. 312, o.2, d. 10, l. 10. F. 312, o. 1, d. 39, l. 3–6. F. 312, o. 1, d. 63, l. 8. For examples of their government description, see ARDTA, f. 312, o. 1, d. 39. l.1. F. 312, o. 2, d .9, l. 3. F. 312, o. 1, d. 30, l.1.)

However, the state authority monitored the *Neshr-i Maarif*'s activity closely because of its intellectual independence that, in the government's opinion, contributed to the rise of nationalism (the violent episodes of Armenian-Muslim wars in Azerbaijan) and the alleged support of Bolsheviks (industrial workers' riots and printing of the first Bolshevik newspaper – *Iskra, Spark*) in the largest Azeri urban centre – Baku. Regarding that strategy, the *Neshr-i Maarif* society, in the first year of its emergence, 1908, established literacy courses for adults and three schools for young men in Baku alone. By 1911 the society had opened another eleven schools for boys in Baku and its surroundings.¹⁰⁵ However, the most important achievement was the establishment, in 1915, of the pedagogical seminary for young Muslim women organized for graduates of the first new-method public school for girls that had also operated under the patronage of H. Z. Tagiev since 1901. The foundation of this first public school and pedagogical training centre for Muslim young women in Baku planted seeds for transforming the traditional gender roles of Islamic society in this region.

Thus, the incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Russian Empire created significant societal changes. One of them was the formation of a secular, educated, male elite that initiated a societal reformation at the end of the nineteenth century. The tsarist government itself stimulated the emergence of this European-type intellectual cohort. Even though the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment opened schools for Muslims with the aim of promoting the ultimate Russification of Transcaucasian Muslims, they empowered Azeri Muslims in their pursuit of Azeri national identity and cultural equality within the Russian empire.

The Azeri reformers who founded modernized *maktabs* worked in a relatively positive environment that helped them to create modern institutions of education, secular and bilingual,

¹⁰⁵ *Neshr-i Maarif*, ARDTA f. 312, o. 1, d. 6, l. 1–5. F. 312, o. 1, d. 39, l. 1.

that raised many young men to become equally fluent in Russian and in Azeri Turkish. Those graduates of government Russian-Tatar schools for Muslims and reformed *maktabs* became intellectually closer to the educated societies of western European countries and the Russian Empire rather than to traditional Islamic culture. Their newly formed vision of civilized society inspired them to transform the broader Muslim population. The growing independent bilingual print media helped reformers link European culture with local traditions to modernize Muslim society in conformity with the requirements of the scientifically and industrially advanced West.

The Azeri reformers' view of the outdated educational system as a hallmark of societal backwardness prompted their efforts at educational reform; the result was the introduction of the *usul-i jadid* method. Modern non-religious training in the native language aimed to develop a Western-style society free from patriarchal traditions. This half-century-long discourse on enlightenment primed the mentality of many Azerbaijani Muslims to realize a project in the early 1900s that changed traditional gender roles within the urban Azerbaijani community.

Chapter Two

The Reformist's Discourse on Muslim Women's Societal Position

The idea that educating Muslim women would bring positive cultural changes began to travel across the Islamic world at the end of the nineteenth century. Muslim societal reformers, particularly in the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, formed a strong intellectual network and shared their publications on girls' upbringing and education, and on women's social roles.¹ In Azerbaijan, since the mid-1890s, reformers had begun to voice their thoughts that women's lack of education was the major factor that kept their *millat*, their people, behind the advanced nations of Western civilization. To remedy this situation, with the help of wealthy native elite, the reformers established a few modern schools to educate girls and young women, believing that educated mothers would revive their community. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Muslim elite women who gained modern training began to express their opinions in local periodicals and in the *Ishig*, the journal established by elite Azeri women, for Azeri women in 1911. Also, they established several Muslim women's associations to promote modern education and the end of female seclusion. Those associations, along with the first public schools for young women, promoted Muslim women's views on male-female equality, and cultivated prominent activists who later welcomed the early Soviet gender reorganization project of 1920s.

This chapter examines the Azerbaijani intellectuals' ideas on gender reformation through the introduction of new-method education for Muslim girls and young women, as well as the abolition of veiling and seclusion. It focuses on one specific project, the first new-method public

¹ Ismail Gaspirali, *Gadinlar* (Bakhchisarai, 1881); Mirza Aga Khan Kirmani, *Sad Khatabah* (Tehran, 1889); Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* (Cairo, 1898); Qasim Amin, *The New Woman: Two Documents on Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo, 1899).

school and female teacher training centre established by H. Z. Tagiev, the Azeri oil magnate and philanthropist, that changed the societal position of urban Muslim women. I argue in this chapter that the modern public schooling program shaped a new generation of Muslim women who continued the policies for female emancipation after the Sovietization of Azerbaijan in 1920. I build my arguments on the critical examination of articles from contemporary periodicals, pamphlets, and books. This research also relies on documents from the Azerbaijani State History Archive, ARDTA, about the project to establish the first public schools for Muslim young women in Baku and its surroundings.

The Reformist's Call to Educate Women

The mother's duty is to bring up her children to make them citizens of the modern state. However, this is impossible to achieve if women are not free in their choices on education, marriage, and divorce; the choices that are legitimate in a civilized state.

M. Shakhtakhtinskii, *Novoie Obozreniie*, November 11, 1905.²

By the end of the nineteenth century in Azerbaijan, as discussed elsewhere, the influence of Western culture changed the traditional concept of knowledge transforming it from Islamic models into modern, scientific, pro-European models. Another important shift was the emergence of the concept that literacy is a cornerstone of a modern society; this led to the introduction of the new-method schools for boys. Muslim modernists' ideas on the importance of female education came significantly later. Moreover, the projects dealing with women's enlightenment were always linked with motherhood and the fate of the imagined new nation, *millat*.

² M. Shakhtakhtinskii, "Konstitutsiia i musul'mane," *Novoie Obozreniie*, November 11, 1905.

Mirza Fatali Akhundov first introduced the idea of transforming women's societal status by introducing female characters who played critical roles in changing the course of events. Between 1851 and 1855 he wrote several plays that presented strong-willed women instead of passive creatures. In his first play, *Hekaieti Miusie Jordan Hekimi-Nebatat ve Dervish Mastali Shah Cadiukuni Məshhur, The Story of Monsieur Jourdan the Botanist and Dervish Mast Ali Shah Widely Known as a Magician* (1850), female characters still acted as the representatives of traditional customs and as the main victims of superstitious beliefs. These female characters wished to prevent a young man, Shahbaz Bek, from travelling to Paris. Thus, they employed the charlatan, Dervish Mast Ali Shah, sincerely believing that his magical powers could change the course of events. In a satirical manner, Akhundov demonstrated how family traditions and customs prevented the intellectual development of a young Muslim man, and stopped him from studying foreign cultures and languages, instead urging him to marry his cousin.³

In his play *Lenkaran Khanının Vezirinin Serguzəstleri, The Story of the Vezir of the Khan of Lenkaran* (1851), he introduced another type of female character, the independent-minded female individual who refused to obey the authority of a corrupt, tyrannical, and polygamist man, the head of the family.⁴ In his stories *Hikaiat-i Khirs-i Quldur-basan, The Story of the Bear that Caught the Robber* (1852), and *Sergiuzeshti Merdi-Khesis (Hacı Qara), The Adventures of the Miser* (1853), Akhundov presented the Russian authority as the defender of Muslim women who strove to gain freedom in love and marriage. He showed the Russian state as the agent of modernization that would destroy the power of the traditional Muslim family. *The Story of the Bear that Caught the Robber* is about love between a young man, Bairam, and a young woman, Parizad, who cannot get married because their parents arranged their marriages with other suitors

³ Mirza Fatali Akhundov, *Komediialar* (Baku: Yazıçılı, 1987), 35–39.

⁴ Akhundov, *Komediialar*, 55–58.

for the benefit of their clans. Only the intervention of Russian authorities helped the young lovers to get married. The play ends with a speech by a Russian official, who pleads with the Muslim villagers to transform themselves from a savage people into a civilized one.⁵ In this play, Akhundov showed the conflict between the modernity of the rational West on the one hand and the superstitious beliefs and traditions of Muslim realities on the other. He portrayed the Russian authority as a modernizing force and liberator of Muslim society and Muslim women.

In his writings, Akhundov identified Islamic clerics as the major actors who kept the oppressive rules against women and imposed veils on them.⁶ In his major philosophical work entitled *Kemaluddovlā Mektublar, The Letters of the Prince Kamal*, he attacked Islam as an oppressive religion particularly in its treatment of women and argued that Islam could not be compatible with modernity.⁷ He supported his arguments by analyzing the life and teachings of the prophet Muhammad in the context of the prophet's personal, emotional, and sexual aspects that had a major impact on the Muslim perception of women and their role in society.

Akhundov divided the life of the Prophet Muhammad into two marked periods: the Mecca period (610–622 AD) and the Medina period, the *Hijra*, (622–632 AD). Akhundov argued that during the Medina period when the number of the prophet's followers increased; he became so powerful that he could cover his "lust" for women using "divine revelations" to steal even married women from their husbands.⁸ As an old man with many wives, he offered several "divine revelations" to maintain his control over his women. This became clear after the affair with Aisha, the prophet's youngest wife; this young woman was lost in the desert and spent a night with a man before returning to her husband. This event put her chastity under scrutiny. The existence of those

⁵ Akhundov, *Komediialar*, 83-87.

⁶ Mirza Fatali Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla: Filosofskii traktat* (Baku: Elm, 1986), 10.

⁷ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 14.

⁸ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 60–63.

rumors forced the Prophet to impose veiling on his wives, to demand from the male members of the Muslim community to speak to the Prophet's wives only from behind a curtain. Along with those regulations, the prophet prohibited any of his wives to remarry after his death.⁹ In Akhundov's view the jealous nature of a Muslim religious leader who did not wish to lose his control over his wives even after his death caused Muslim women to wear the veil and to lose their basic rights and freedoms forever.¹⁰

The restriction on Muslim women's public visibility prevented them from attending school or learning the various arts and sciences, and thus, violated their basic human rights.¹¹ Akhundov argued that the veil and seclusion also led to a variety of illnesses.¹² Along with this, such gendered relationships made Muslim men corrupt and violent savages who could abuse their wives. Polygyny, in his view, legitimized the Muslim man's right to have four wives and an unlimited number of concubines, and thus, oppressed the man's first wife and caused conflicts between his children.¹³ Also, Akhundov stated that in accordance with *Shia* tradition, men could commit legitimized adultery by having temporary marriages, *sigheh*, to satisfy their sexual needs as many times as they could afford it physically and financially.¹⁴ So, Akhundov asked, how it was possible that this religion, which claimed to be egalitarian, treated half of human beings so unfairly?¹⁵ Akhundov found the solution to improve Muslim women's position in examples of the European societies' history where women were treated equally, even allowing them to be the heads of states

⁹ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 86.

¹⁰ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 93.

¹¹ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 113.

¹² Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 118.

¹³ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 134–134.

¹⁴ *Sigheh* or *Nikah mut'ah* is a private and verbal temporary marriage contract that is practiced among *Shia* Muslims for durations from at least three days to several months. J. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 221.

¹⁵ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 158–160.

and armies. He also noticed that Turkic women had such opportunities during ancient times but lost them with the Arabic invasion and Islamic indoctrination.¹⁶

Akhundov became familiar with the Western European women's position through Russian translations of Western intellectual writings and recently emerged Russian discourse on gender roles among the Slavs. The writings of Russian intellectuals concerning women's position were part of the Western European socialist and feminist movements of the 1830s and 1840s. In particular, the voice of the French writer George Sand (Aurore Dupin Dudevant, 1804–1876) influenced the first generation of the Russian intelligentsia: Alexander Herzen, Vissarion Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and Ivan Turgenev. Sand proclaimed freedom in love for both genders and criticized marriage based on traditional arrangements rather than on spiritual and physical harmony. She argued for woman's right to choose a partner and to end a marriage if the union deprived her of the realization of her creative potential and diminished her status to the level of a servant.¹⁷

Russian writers, being inspired by this philosophy and calling it “Zhorzhandism,” promoted her ideas of “liberation of the heart” in their writing.¹⁸ Akhundov's philosophical pamphlets express his admiration for Russian literature about the improvement of women's position in Russia as well. Nevertheless, Akhundov acknowledged that a Muslim woman could achieve the “liberation of her heart” only after her liberation from the Islamic norms of conduct between genders. He believed that such a task could be realized under the guidance of the Russian “civilized” power that represented European cultural values in Transcaucasia.¹⁹

¹⁶ Akhundov, *Pis'ma Kamal ud-Dowla*, 160–163.

¹⁷ Dawn D. Eidelman, *George Sand and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Love-Triangle Novels* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1994), 65.

¹⁸ Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812–1855* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 265–267.

¹⁹ Mirza Fatali Akhundov, *Alifba-i Jadid va Maktubad*, 244–245.

From the end of the nineteenth century, many Azerbaijani intellectuals followed Akhundov's discourse against religious doctrines on women, the veil, and seclusion. Azeri intellectuals, such as Dzhaliil Mamedkulizade, Hamida Javanshir, Khadidzha Alibekova, and Akhmed bek Agayev argued that the practice of veiling was a fundamental issue and symbol of female societal isolation among Muslims.²⁰ In Azerbaijan, veiling was culturally specific among certain parts of the Muslim population. Azeri women of urban communities wore a face and body-covering veil, *chadra*. In contrast, rural and nomadic women who worked in the fields and moved the herds from summer to winter pasturelands neither covered their faces nor wrapped their bodies. They wore the head scarf, mostly *kelagaia* or *orpak*, as sign of modesty.²¹

The subject of veil abolition had its supporters and opponents within the Muslim society of the Russian empire. Unlike the Central Asian *Jadids* who did not discuss the abolition of the veil and the end of gender segregation, the Tatar and Azerbaijani reformers argued that it was a symbol of women's oppression and connected it to the backwardness of society that should be eliminated. As the *Jadid* discourse in Central Asia emerged primarily among the intellectuals of contemporary Uzbekistan, I will focus on the discussion of Muslim women's position in this Central Asian entity within the Russian empire and later the Soviet Union and compare it to the Azeri discourse.

In 1867, the Russian army invaded three khanates: Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva, incorporating them into one province, Turkestan, under the rule of the Russian governor-general. Later, the Soviet authorities created the republic of Uzbekistan from these three entities. Russian

²⁰ Dzh. Mamedkulizade, "Khidzhab meselesi," *Molla Nasreddin*, June 25, 1907; Mamedkulizade "Khamile arvad," *Molla Nasreddin*, June 29, 1907; Mamedkulizade "Qarimish giziznin atasi ve anasi," *Molla Nasreddin*, September 2, 1907; *Molla Nasreddin*, "Bir yolu vardi" 19 May 1907; Kh. Javanshir Mamedkulizade, *Moi vospominaniia o Dzhaliile Mamedkulizade* Baku: Elm, 1970), 16–18, 22–25; Kh. Alibekova, "Bizim huguglalar," *Ishig* 1 (1911), 8–9; A. Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame* (Tiflis, 1901), 58–59.

²¹ *Azerbaycan Etnografiyasi*, 3 vols. (Baku: Sherg-Gerb: Baku, 2007), on different headcover styles, 2:130. On *chadra*, *ibid.* 2:130–136.

colonial rule brought significant changes to this region. Russians built railroads, cultivated cotton, and introduced European-style print media. In the 1880s, the tsarist government abolished the widespread institution of slavery. The legal changes made the local Muslims subject to Russian courts in criminal cases, leaving civil and family matters to *Sharia* law, while in Azerbaijan only family troubles could be solved with *Sharia* edicts.²²

Nevertheless, the tsarist regime did not promote the extensive assimilation of Turkestani Muslims as elsewhere in the empire. Adeeb Khalid stressed that the Russian conception of colonial rule in Central Asia was remarkably different from those that the tsarist regime introduced earlier in other occupied regions: it did not cooperate with local nobility and did not integrate the conquered population into the Russian social-cultural system.²³ In Turkestan, the tsarist government recognized only Russian settlers as Russian citizens while in Azerbaijan all residents regardless of their religious belonging became imperial citizens from the start of its incorporation. Turkestanis could obtain citizenship only by providing exceptional service to the Russian state.²⁴ The local population remained “natives” within the multinational Russian empire.²⁵ Turkestani nobility, unlike Azeri Muslims of noble origin, were deprived of the right to serve in the military and civil administrations. Such politics enlarged the gaps that separated the colonizers and colonized. Russians in Turkestan believed in their cultural superiority while the locals, fearing the perceived corruption of the traditional societal order, increased measures to keep their people from Russian influence. As Kamp argues, Uzbeks and other “natives” took active measures to shield

²² Marianne Kamp, *New Woman of Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 22.

²³ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 15.

²⁴ Kamp, *New Woman of Uzbekistan*, 23.

²⁵ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 15.

their women from any Russian influence: “the veil that urban women wore became a sign of identity as well as a physical barrier placed between the woman and the foreigner.”²⁶

In Uzbekistan, the response to Russian colonial rule was a mixture of resistance and reform, while in Azerbaijan it led to a profound assimilation of the urban Muslim nobility and intelligentsia. Those Uzbeks who chose the reformation of Muslim society were largely urban *ulama* and merchants who had interactions with Russian social institutions. The reformers, *Jadids*, advocated for learning modern knowledge from their rulers and simultaneously preserving their identities. The debates among *Jadids* on the degree of Russian culture adaptation gave rise to two opposite camps. One group stood for integration while the other group rejected it. However, as Khalid states, both groups criticized the practice of polygyny, women’s poor societal position, and a lack of female education as factors that kept their imagined nation ignorant.²⁷ *Jadids*, building their arguments within the context of the Islamic realm, did not agree among themselves about the acceptable degree of female transformation. The progressives stood for the introduction of modern education and the reformation of Muslim laws about marriage and divorce. Their opponents, traditionalists, argued for simply teaching women Islamic law, aiming to empower Muslim women in the family and marriage but not to modify Islamic doctrines.²⁸

In Uzbekistan, Behbudi, Fitrat, Awlani, Hamza, and other intellectuals justified the benefits of science, female education, and a strong monogamous family required to foster a new civilized nation. They found inspiration in the discourse of the Tatar *Jadids* and those Tatars who lived in Turkestan.²⁹ Tatar women were not veiled and led an active public life by establishing modern schools for girls and contributing to the women’s journals *Alem-i Nisvan* and *Soyum Bike*. They

²⁶ Kamp, *New Woman of Uzbekistan*, 23.

²⁷ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 225.

²⁸ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 227.

²⁹ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 223.

were visible symbols of gender reforms in the Muslim world. The progressives faced strong opposition from traditionalists, who followed the Koranic prescription on gender roles to the letter.³⁰ The traditionalists stood for the enforcement of the Islamic norms of living arguing that Tatar influence was harmful for Muslims because it propagandized the rejection of female chastity through the abolition of the veil and of changes in women's status.³¹ Their voices were so strong and influential that they suppressed the discourse of the progressives making the impact of the latter group on the society very insignificant. In this situation, the progressives never explicitly raised the problem of veil abolition. As Khalid concludes, *Jadid* attitudes on gender problems in general were conservative and did not bring fundamental changes to Uzbek society.³² Hence, dissimilarities between the degree to which Azeris and Uzbeks were integrated into the world of Russian colonialists produced different discourses about Muslim women's emancipation.

In Azerbaijan, the discussion about the need to change gender roles began in the mid-1850s and did not face as strong opposition as *Jadids* faced in Uzbekistan. Azerbaijani men of letters published articles arguing against veiling and women's segregation. Hussein Minasazov believed that a nation where a woman is secluded is like a human body with one paralyzed side; thus, involving women in public life was a step towards societal progress. He proposed the introduction of civil laws, other than *Sharia*, that would protect women from harassment and preserve all freedoms that were achieved. Otherwise, any discourse on female emancipation would only be meaningless bombast.³³ Nevertheless, in Azerbaijan, like in Uzbekistan, the opponents to unveiling and to the end of gender segregation were Islamic religious authorities.

³⁰ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 227.

³¹ Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 228.

³² Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 227.

³³ H. Minasazov, "Otkrytoie pis'mo redaktoru gazety "Irshad" Ahmed-beku Agayevu," *Zakavkaz'ie*, June 8, 1907.

The Muslim clergy of both regions supported their arguments with the Koranic covenants that place man in authority over woman in her public role and dress. The traditional understanding of gender relations made women responsible for sexual impropriety within the societal order.³⁴ Islamic kinship categories regulated women's social contact with men. Those who came under the category of *mahram*, first-degree male kin and milk brothers, could interact relatively easily with Muslim women. Those who belonged to the *namahram* category, all non-blood related males, qualified for marriage, and thus, should not have contact with Muslim females, who also had to be veiled in those men's presence.³⁵ Along with this, the traditional code of conduct in Azerbaijan made women responsible for family honor, *namus*, through their chastity and modesty. *Namus* was strictly under the guardianship of male family members and its violation brought the shame on the whole clan and could be atoned for only by the blood of its violator.³⁶

The role of Islamic and traditional norms of conduct became central to the discussion about changes in gender roles. In 1895, essayist Firudin Kocharli argued that Islam did not deprive women of freedom, but that *mullahs*, Muslim clergy, called the women *najis*, impure creatures, in their sermons, and thus promoted inequality. Kocharli argued that this position on women's enslavement is alien to Islam; Islam strongly appreciates women's dignity and grants them a wide range of rights. He stated that the Koran does not demand veiling, but only orders women to hide some parts of the body that can cause temptation.³⁷ In another article, the author pointed to Iranian pre-Islamic traditions which kept women secluded, leading to Muslim women's gradual retreat behind a screen and enslavement by their husbands.³⁸ In 1902, the famous Azerbaijani essayist

³⁴ F. Kocharlinskii, "O polozhenii zhenschin i vospitanii detei u musul'man," *Novoie Obozreniie*, December 20, 1895.

³⁵ *Khidaia, commentarii musul'manskogo prava* (Tashkent, 1893), 135–151.

³⁶ S. Agamali-ogli, *Namus v zatvornicheskikh obshchestvakh islamskogo mira* (Baku: Azgiz, 1929), 10-15.

³⁷ F. Kocharlinskii, "O polozhenii zhenschin i vospitanii detei u musul'man," *Novoie Obozreniie*, December 20, 1895.

³⁸ F. Kocharlinskii, "Musul'manka v nastoiashchem," *Zakavkazskoie Obozreniie*, November 24, 1910.

Teimur Bairamalibekov, also attacked the misunderstandings of Islamic norms and misinterpretations of *Sharia* law that brought so much harm to Muslim women.³⁹

In 1901, the discussion on female enlightenment, unveiling, and the end of segregation gained a larger scale after Akhmed bek Agayev's publication of *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame, Women According to Islam and in Islam*.⁴⁰ Written in Russian, the book was the first unified work that evaluated the causes of Muslim women's underprivileged position and argued that the specific repressive institutions that limited women's status in the Muslim society did not exist in Islam and even contradict its true spirit. Agayev claimed that the Prophet Mohammed granted many rights to Muslim women. In his opinion, the pre-Islamic traditions, which became part of Muslim culture after the incorporation of new lands into the khalifate, ruined the true Koranic norms and affected the female position adversely. This incorporation led to cultural stagnation over time and resulted in women's subjugation. Moreover, the prophet Mohammed always cared about the weak and the helpless, particularly Muslim women, and thus, he took special steps to protect them. The Koran recognized women as equal to men in their rights in administration, inheritance, and property ownership.⁴¹

Agayev did not define women's rights within the Koran regarding companionate marriage, divorce, and the right to live independently without male custody. However, he attacked polygamy, veiling, and seclusion, again pointing out that these practices were introduced by host cultures after Arabs advanced into newly-gained lands.⁴² He also introduced the idea that, unlike harmful pre-Islamic Iranian traditions, the old Turkic nomadic culture allowed women to be free and to act as the masters of their lives.

³⁹ T. Bairamalibekov, "Nashi nray", *Kaspii*, May 9, 1902.

⁴⁰ A. Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame* (Tiflis: Skoropech. M. Martirosiantsa, 1901).

⁴¹ Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame*, 18–21.

⁴² Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame*, 26.

Agayev stated that Turkic traditions regarding female freedom permitted women to be socially and physically active, and thus, led to the birth of strong and freedom-inclined people.⁴³ However, later the old Persian and then the mistaken Islamic traditions isolated women and became the main factors in the emergence of the morally enslaved Turkic people. With this statement the author, like other intellectuals, connected motherhood with the health of the nation.⁴⁴ Furthermore, to improve this situation he proposed looking at models in the Western world where gender segregation does not exist, where educated mothers are active in children's upbringing and where both genders are members of their community and value their sense of liberty. He noticed that the level of female literacy and public mobility is a mirror of societal progress and liberalism. Also, clearly understanding that education is usually unavailable to lower-class women, he proposed encouraging upper-class members of society to educate the lower strata of their community. In this way, through the total enlightenment of Muslim women, he hoped to end gender segregation and veiling. Thus, a progressive society of individuals who share the same collective identity – Muslim and Turkic – would develop someday.⁴⁵

Another account of how women's position kept the nation ignorant belonged to Yousif Vezirov. In his diaries, he recalled with admiration the days he spent in Russia witnessing young ladies freely expressing their ideas on politics and culture, playing piano, and reciting poetry to the public. Vezirov noticed with bitterness how much he and his nation had lost because of gender segregation among Muslims. He stated that a nation where women are free to get an education and where they have the choice to marry would prosper:

Every fashionable topic of conversation between young men and ladies saddened my soul. I often asked myself why I did not come from an enlightened nation and educated family. Why did I not meet these people earlier? Why? Why? This question rang in my ears and

⁴³ Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame*, 50–51.

⁴⁴ Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame*, 58.

⁴⁵ Agaev, *Zhenshchina po Islamu i v Islame*, 59.

ran through my body, making me shiver. I was grieving and mourning. Where, where did those twenty years of my life pass? ⁴⁶



Figure 5. Yusif Vezirov (1887 – 1943). AAKFD photo.



Figure 6. Yusuf Vezirov with his family. Shusha, 1906. AAKFD photo.

Vezirov also examined women’s roles in society in a chapter titled “How women have influenced me?” He maintained that women’s influence is a vital part of balanced individual development. He described how two Russian young ladies, Olechka and Verochka helped him to realize this:

⁴⁶ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 103–104.

Two ladies have played an important role in my life. I state without hesitation that these women have been the reasons for my important moral development. The first one, Olechka, saved me from moral decadence and the sins of adolescence. She gave me a sense of life. She introduced me to European literature and female roles in Western society. I learned about women's emancipation, which is important for every human being, especially for me, as a Tatar person whose nation hides its women. The second lady shaped my social life. She, Verochka, introduced me to Russian societies, clubs, and dances: things which were unimportant and unattractive before I met her. Thus, communication with these elegant ladies taught me that female creatures can be pure, poetical, and moral.⁴⁷

Experiencing such feelings, he concluded that his traditional Muslim family where women had been isolated was reactionary, and he denounced it as a graveyard of human hopes. Also, he criticized all of his female relatives for their caustic language in their interactions with each other, their fights, their hypocrisies, and their intolerance towards each other. Thus, he proposed keeping only one memento from his home: "the family's group portrait, where they are so kind, beautiful, good, and without.... souls."⁴⁸ Vezirov became an ardent proponent of Muslim women's emancipation:

I wait with impatience for women's liberation as the only way to change my and other families' lives. Emancipation will allow us to freely send our sons and daughters to school and make us civilized.⁴⁹

This negative description of the Muslim family was part of an already existing discussion on the role of the mother; this discussion focused on the norms of her upbringing.

In traditional Muslim society, the concepts of family, woman, and mother are described through the prism of a proper man: the man is the head of the community, the family, and is in charge of educating the sons as future leaders in the family and community; the biological mother

⁴⁷ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l.16.

⁴⁸ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f. 21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 106–107.

⁴⁹ Vezirov, *Moi dnevnik*, ARIM f.21, op. 1, d. 183, l. 8–9.

is not essential as the caretaker of the child.⁵⁰ However, as education became the subject of national progress reformers came to define the family as the nucleus of the nation. Thus, women became the foundation of the nation; their intellectual development or underdevelopment corresponded to the level of development of the nation. The male intellectual elite produced and translated the vast literature on women's training in motherhood, scientific child-rearing, and housekeeping. In doing so, they had one aim: to make family a nucleus of the *millat*, and to have the whole society in turn prosper and become civilized. Publications on women's education and childrearing methods marked an important moment in Islamic society. This was the moment of intervention by male intellectuals into traditionally female domains. Previously, all knowledge on children's upbringing and girls' education had been passed orally from elder women to younger ones, leaving this knowledge within the boundaries of the Islamic gender specific roles.⁵¹ The entry of male authors into this domain was a direct result of modernist discourse about the upbringing of a new man and the creation of a new nation.

In Azerbaijan, the fundamental works on this subject were two bilingual books, in Azeri and Russian languages. In 1900, the modernist *Shia* cleric *akhund* Youssef Talyb-zade published a book entitled *Gadnlara Hadiie – Podarok Zhenshchinam, A Gift to Women*. In 1901, M. Ganiiev released a book *Galin uchun Nasikhat - Pamiatka dlia Nevesty, The Instruction for a Bride*. The first book provided guidelines on modern educational, spiritual, and physical methods for raising children. It also gave advice on scientific approaches to pregnancy, and on keeping the body clean

⁵⁰ Nasir ad-Din Tusi, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G. M. Wickens (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 160–161. For example, M. F. Akhundov's mother was a wife to a polygamist man of Iranian nationality. She had to divorce her husband because of his and his elder wife's cruel behaviour towards her and her young son. However, in accordance with the traditions and Islamic norms of conduct she could not live independently and had to reside under male guardianship. In her case it was her uncle, *akhund*, *Shia* cleric, Haji Alaskar who took care of her son. Also, she, like other Muslim single mothers, could not raise her son alone, so she had to give Haji Alaskar full custody over her son. Later, this guardian turned into a teacher for her son, preparing the young boy to become *akhund*. F. Qasimzade, *M. F. Akhundovun heyat və yaradıcılığı* (Baku: Yazıçı, 1962), 43–45.

⁵¹ *Azerbaycan Etnoqrafiyası*, 2: 356–360.

by following hygiene routines and physical exercises. The author supported his arguments with quotations from the works of European philosophers, pedagogues, and doctors.⁵² Ganiev's book emphasized the role of the biological mother in her children's lives and the strong need to become a modern woman for the good of the nation. It encouraged each woman to consider her house as a kingdom and to learn to run it well by applying modern knowledge and high moral standards: honesty, humanity, responsibility, punctuality, good manners, strength in the face of difficulties, and a desire to learn and to teach. These were all the qualities much needed for bringing up a modern and civilized generation of a new *millat*.⁵³ It is worth mentioning that the graduates of the first secular school for girls, *Tagiev school*, received these books as a gift during the convocation ceremony.

This dialogue on women's role in the family and in society echoes the discourse that the reformers of neighboring Iran promoted it in the specific gender-related literature. Along with this, the important works on Muslim women's emancipation by Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* (1898) and *The New Women: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism* (1899), were translated into Persian in Iran in 1900 and into Russian in 1912. The Iranian modernizers of the end of the nineteenth century also introduced a new kind of wife and mother. M. A. Kermani, in *Sad Khtabah, One Hundred Discourses* (1892), and Y. Ashtiani, who translated and significantly modified Qasim Amin's book *Liberation of Women* for Iranian society, emphasized the role of educating mothers in the process of the formation of a modern nation. They also gave many suggestions about scientific child-rearing and modern womanhood and motherhood.⁵⁴ Like Azerbaijani reformers, the Iranians also claimed that Muslim women should have more autonomy

⁵² Youssef Talyb-zade, *Gadinlara Hadiie – Podarok Zhenshchinam* (Baku: Pechatnyi Dom, 1900), 13–18.

⁵³ M. Ganiev, *Galim uchun Nasikhat- Pamiatka dlia Nevesty* (Baku: Pechatnyi Dom, 1901), 19–21.

⁵⁴ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 90.

within the family and public life. Kermani called Iranian women “the living dead,” describing them as passive victims of the morally corrupt society that deprived them of all freedoms installed centuries ago by the inferior Arabs. He criticized polygyny, which caused a lack of love and friendship between spouses. Kermani, like Akhundov, also criticized temporary marriages, *sigiah*, common among *Shia* people, that were the causes of venereal diseases and prostitution. This rhetoric echoes the discussion about the negative sides of polygyny among the Azeri reformers. In 1907, M. Shakhtakhtinskii, the noticeable public figure and journalist, pointed to the issue of polygyny and women’s seclusion as the principal causes of Muslim societal stagnation:

Polygyny was responsible for depriving women of rights converting them into the slaves of tyrannical men. Women’s oppression harms the physical and intellectual power of a nation. Forced and underaged marriages are social immoralities.⁵⁵

M. Shakhtakhtinskii also compared the status of Muslim women to the position of their European counterparts and concluded that in Europe a woman had more freedom within the family and society and could realize her ambitions as a helper of her husband and children.⁵⁶

The important feature of the Iranian discourse was that unlike Azerbaijani enlighteners, the Iranian reformers were concerned with the fate of Iran as a nation-state and promoted an image of a new perfect man – an Iranian citizen raised by the enlightened mother.⁵⁷ As Camron Michael Amin illustrates, this process began in the late nineteenth century in the pages of the first women’s print media *Danesh*, *Knowledge*, and *Shokufeh*, *Blossom*. These publications conveyed the image of the modern Iranian woman, which was modelled on the European female image, and contrasted it with backward traditional womanhood. Both women’s journals also heralded the image of an

⁵⁵ M. Shakhtakhtinskii, “Ievropeizatsiia musul’man,” *Rossiiia*, August 17, 1907.

⁵⁶ M. Shakhtakhtinskii, “Ievropeizatsiia musul’man,” *Rossiiia*, August 17, 1907.

⁵⁷ Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran,” 92–94.

educated wife and mother who was able to enter a companionate and monogamous marriage, the vital factors to foster free citizens of modern Iran.⁵⁸

Similarly, Russian society went through the reorganization of the female position beginning in the early nineteenth century. The growth of maternal feminism in Russia may have been due in part to the rapid expansion and empowerment of the Russian empire after 1830s in the Caucasus and Central Asia and, since 1870s, on the Balkan Peninsula.⁵⁹ The Russian state propagandized that Russian and other Slavic women to have more children since they were surrounded by *inorodtsy* and suffered from the long-lasting Muslim occupation of the Balkans.⁶⁰ The state introduced such rhetoric as part of the official ideological doctrine *Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality* by the Russian emperor Nicholas I (1825–1855). In this triangle doctrine *Orthodoxy* and *Autocracy* stood for the power of religion and a strong, autocratic, absolute monarch that were the unconditional bases of the existence and strength of Russia on the mainland and in the newly-gained territories. *Nationality* postulated the necessity to follow national Slavic traditions and to fight any foreign influence, in particular the Western.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865–1946* (Gainesville : University Press of Florida, 2002), 114–115.

⁵⁹ Maternal feminism was the belief of many European and particularly British feminists, from the mid-1800s, that women as mothers and caregivers had an important role to play in society, fostering new citizens of the industrially and culturally advanced state.

⁶⁰ On women's position in Russian Empire and feminism see: Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860 – 1930* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Barbara Alpern Engel, "Peasant Morality and Pre-Marital Relations in Late 19th Century Russia." *Journal of Social History* 23.4 (1990): 695–714; Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin and Gail Lapidus, *Women in Russia* (Stanford University Press, 1977); R. Bisha, *Russian Women, 1698 – 1917: Experiences and Expression, an Anthology of Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2002); Barbara Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Indiana University Press, 2012); Natalia Pushkareva, trans. Eve Levin, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century (New Russian History)* (Routledge, 2015).

Inorodtsy – in Russian, the non-Russian population of the empire whose privileges and special treatment sometimes included exemption from military service and religious and governmental self-administration.

⁶¹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 144–148; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Nationality" in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I. *The Russian Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jan., 1960), pp. 38-46.

In Russia, the feminists of the early 1800s argued that love and purity, the values of home, should become the guiding principles of every Slavic woman. However, since the mid-1860s the discourse on female roles in Russian society changed due to the advance of the era of liberalization that resulted in the abolition of serfdom in 1861, and the emergence of independent print media and some civil liberties. In Russia, many prominent people and particularly notable writers began to argue for increasing the power and independence of women in their society and supported the growing concern for gender equality outside the traditional family. Among them were: A. I. Herzen, *Who is to Blame* (1847); N. G. Chernyshevsky *What is to be Done* (1863); I. Turgenev, *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1859), *On the Eve* (1860); L. Tolstoy *Family Happiness* (1859), *Anna Karenina* (1877), *Resurrection* (1899). These writers not only described the parochial character of the traditional family life that suffocated women, but also embodied the new feminist ideas of future utopian societies with equality among the sexes.

Azerbaijani writers such as Eyneli Sultanov (*Turk Qizi, Turkic Girl*, 1892), Sultan Ganiev (*Goncha Khanum, Lady Goncha*, 1906), Dz. Mamedkulizade (*Danabash Kendinin Ekhvalatlari, The Events in the Village called Cattle Heads*, 1894; *Bakhadur va Sona, Bakhadur and Sona*, 1896), Y. Vezirov *Chamanzaminli (Soiug Opush, Cold Kiss*, 1907; *Qizlar Bulagi, Girls' Creek*, 1908), and many others followed their Russian counterparts and introduced the image of women subordinated to patriarchal traditions with a strong desire to end them even by sacrificing their lives. Azerbaijani men of letters also crafted an image of a new woman: the gentle wife and the scientific mother who could give birth and raise only future state leaders, lawyers, doctors, scientists, and lawful citizens, and nothing less.⁶²

⁶² Er-arvad, *Molla Nasreddin* 52, 1907.

For this purpose, writers gave advice about the methods to look after sons and husbands to prevent them from pursuing useless pastimes at the teahouse, and instead to keep them at home with family. A good woman had to give them an opportunity to read a newspaper or play chess with each other, while she read a book or entertained her family by playing the piano.⁶³ Thus, women became responsible for providing a positive environment for personal development and for preventing their husbands and sons from engaging in bad behavior. Uneducated and ignorant women became unsuitable as spouses and mothers for modern educated men: many young modern Muslim men refused to marry ignorant and secluded Muslim young women and instead dreamed about wives as life companions, not as unenlightened breeders.⁶⁴ In this way, the modernists promoted a new definition of motherhood. First, children would benefit when both parents were educated and worked in unison on the children's upbringing. Second, these well-trained children of both genders would become the future generation to live in the modern state and would continue to educate their children according to modern norms. Third, the nation, united by unified modern knowledge, would be free from old patriarchal traditions and prejudices. The conception of new types of mothers as the foundation of the proposed *millat* brought new social norms for gendered relationships. In the press, the reformers voiced their arguments for granting Muslim women greater independence from conventional hierarchies within family and society.

Incidentally, some intellectuals from the Russian cultural establishment supported Muslim women's liberation from patriarchal traditions. On February 29, 1900, the Imperial administration founded a society called *Obshchestvo Vostokovedeniia*, *The Society of Oriental Studies*, under the supervision of the Imperial Ministry of Finance. In 1900, Ol'ga Lebedeva, a female Russian

⁶³ Er-arvad, *Molla Nasreddin* 12; 14; 18, 1907.

⁶⁴ Er-arvad, *Molla Nasreddin* 16; 18, 1906. Nariman Narimanov, "K piatidesiatiletiu gospodina G. Z. Tagieva," *Izbrannye proizvedeniia: 1890–1917*. (Baku: AzGiz, 1988), 170.

advocate for Muslim women's enlightenment, described the society's mission to support the Russian Muslim women's struggle for liberation from a backward existence in her work entitled *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny, About Muslim Women's Emancipation*.⁶⁵ Lebedeva argued that society's most important goal was the promotion of modern schooling for young Muslim women who someday would become mothers and continue to teach their children in accordance with modern standards of education. To implement this agenda, the society looked at the *Soiuz Vostochnykh i Zapadnykh Zhenshchin, The Union of Oriental and Western Women*, established in Egypt under Princess Nazli's patronage, as a model. Similarly, the Russian union aimed to promote friendship between the two cultures through the Western-style enlightenment of young Muslim women.⁶⁶

Lebedeva stated that the female population of the Islamic world were slaves to the ignorant and fanatical Muslims who violated the Koranic accords on woman's societal equality.⁶⁷ Lebedeva blamed Muslim clergymen for ruining the Koranic covenants that granted women rights in education and marriage. She supported her claim with the examples from the history of the Abbasid and Cordoba Caliphates, when women led an active public life. However, the war with European crusaders and the invasion of Mongol-Tatars destroyed the old city culture and brought a decline in the level of common literacy and thus, knowledge became consolidated in the hands of the Islamic priests. Muslim women gradually lost all privileges and rights. However, since the beginning of the nineteenth century the advance of French culture into Algeria and Tunisia brought enlightenment to Muslim women there. Becoming enlightened in a European manner, they changed the way of living in their communities and convinced men to support them in this

⁶⁵ Olga Lebedeva, *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Isidora Gol'dberga, 1900), 25.

⁶⁶ Lebedeva, *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny*, 29.

⁶⁷ Lebedeva, *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny*, 5

endeavor.⁶⁸ Lebedeva pointed to the similar awakening of Muslim women of the Ottoman empire, particularly in Syria and Egypt where English and French missionaries taught Muslim women modern knowledge, benevolence, and the norms of public life. Also, Muslim women of Istanbul, Aleppo, and Kairo established print media where they voiced their concerns and argued for the equality with men. Hence, like their French and English counterparts, Russians brought enlightenment to the Muslim East.

Lebedeva highlighted that some Muslim men stood for the reformation of gender roles in the Islamic world. She cited Qasim Amin as the most prominent advocate for female liberation through European-type education and upbringing, through freedom of choice in marriage, and through the abolition of polygyny. She concluded that the cooperation advanced by the *Obshestvo Vostokovedeniia* would emancipate Muslim people from the corrupt clergy, revive true Koranic prescriptions on female roles, and liberate Muslim women from ignorance.⁶⁹ Admittedly, the *Obshestvo Vostokovedeniia* proposing to work with Muslim societal reformers for their mutual benefit propagandized the colonialism that aimed to civilize the dark corners of the empire by revitalizing the true Islamic canons.

The discourse on granting Muslim women rights to voice their thoughts came to fruition in the early 1900s when Azeri women could become writers and journal owners in the booming print media world of the Russian Muslim society. They followed their Tatar female counterparts from the Crimea and Volga regions who issued *Alem-i Nisvan* (1906–1910) and *Soyum Bike* (1912–1916), journals designed for Muslim women and by Muslim elite women. In these women's journals, women had opportunities to express their needs to fit better in the modernizing society. An independent female mass media became an important part of the dialogue on the societal

⁶⁸ Lebedeva, *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny*, 17.

⁶⁹ Lebedeva, *Ob Emansipatsii Musul'manskoi Zhenshchiny*, 34–35.

modernization. In 1911–1912, upper-class Azerbaijani women, the editor Khadidzha Alibekova, and the wives of prominent enlighteners, such as Khanifa Melikova Zardabi, Sakina Akhundova, Amina Efendiieva, Saltanat Amirdzhanova, Rakhila Efendiieva, Shargia Akhundova, and Rakhila Hadzhibababekova published the first journal entitled *Ishig*.

The journal aimed to explain their rights to urban, literate Muslim women in the Azerbaijani and Russian languages.⁷⁰ In its first issue it appealed to “Muslim Mothers” to become the enlightened mothers of the future generation as the main purpose of the female life.⁷¹ Yet, despite the rhetoric on educated women as the foundation of the nation, the child that they had to raise was always a male child. The woman had to nurture the sons of the nation, *millat*, and this was clearly depicted: the cover page of every issue had a picture of a mother in an open-faced *chadra* showing her little son a sun-lit road to the bright horizon.



Figure 7. The cover page of the journal *Ishig*, 1911-1913. Baku. Photo by author.

⁷⁰ “Pis’mo iz Ashkhabada: Khavar khanum k Khadidzha khanum. March 20, 1911,” *Ishig* 12, 1911.

⁷¹ “Pis’mo k materiam musul’mankam,” *Ishig* 1, 1911.

From 1912 on, educated Muslim women wrote article after article about their rights in marriage, divorce, and alimony within Islamic law.⁷² The editors expressed their ideas on motherhood and women's right to modern education while striving for further equality with men in their rights. They also criticized those Muslim men who, instead of enlightening their Muslim wives, chose to live with Russian mistresses and spend all the family money on their clothing and fancy apartments; in this way men, destroyed not only the family financial security but also the morality of their sons by setting such examples.⁷³ Furthermore, the *Ishig* editorial also discussed the process of unveiling and the steps to protect those women who propagandized it. The journal editorial chose a more careful position than the male reformers who advocated for the rapid veil abolition. Women writing in the journal editorial column argued that Muslim society was not yet ready for such novelty and there were no laws that ascribed punishment for harassment of unveiled women. So, female correspondents noticed that for safety reasons it was better to go unveiled in Baku or in the Russian urban centres, but maintain veiling in the smaller regions.⁷⁴ In line with advances in women's education and rights, the journal also shaped new consumerist tastes by advertising European goods (soap, gramophones, clothing), photo ateliers, and theatres. It also promoted the new type of marriage based on the couple's common interests and affection instead of their guardians' preferences.⁷⁵

The rhetoric advocating the new woman gave Muslim women social space and nurtured them as publicly visible and vocal members of local societies. They began to establish associations and charitable societies, such as the *Muslim Women's Benevolent Society*, which consisted of forty-five educated Azeri women of noble backgrounds, with headquarters in Tiflis. The society,

⁷² The editorial column, *Ishig* 5; 7; 9, 1912.

⁷³ The editorial column, *Ishig*, 3; 20, 1911.

⁷⁴ The Editorial column, *Ishig*, 10, 1911.

⁷⁵ "Schastlivyi brak po interesam: iubilei brachnoi gazety," *Ishig* 32, 1911.

established in 1906, promoted financial assistance and literacy courses for women in need. In 1914, Azerbaijani women established the *Baku Muslim Women's Benevolent Society*, which had a similar agenda but focused its benevolence on the female population of Baku and its outskirts. Headed by Liza Mukhtarova, the wife of oil-tycoon Murtuza Mukhtarov, the association consisted of the wives of other local wealthy men.⁷⁶ In 1915 Sona Tagieva, Gul'bakhar Akhreieva, Begum Safaraliieva, and Seiiara Akhmedova established the society to help young Muslim women gain free education at the *Tagiev school*.⁷⁷



Figure 8. Azeri female members of Baku Woman's Benevolent Society. Baku, 1914. AAKFD photo.

⁷⁶ "Nashi Musul'manskie zhenchiny blagotvoritel'nitsy," *Kaspii* 8–9, 1915.

⁷⁷ "Ustav obchshestva vspomochshestvovaniia nedostatochnym uchenitsam Bakinskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandinskogo zhenskogo uchilichsha," (1915) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 780, ll. 1–16.



Figure 9. Azeri female members of Caucasus Muslim Women Benevolent Society. Baku -Tiflis, 1910. AAKFD photo.

It is important to admit that Azeri women expressed their opinions on female public education not only in women's independent print media, but also in the newly-emerged children's journals. As examined earlier, the Azerbaijani press developed at the end of the nineteenth century, focusing first on the issue of Muslim backwardness preserved by outdated Islamic traditions and education. Newly established children's print media, *Dabistan* (1906–1908), *Rakhbar* (1906–1907), *Maktab* (1911–1920), *Tuti* (1914–1917), followed modernist discourse, educating Muslim youth as the main actors in a modern society. These children's journals dedicated their pages to the issues in boys' education that prevented Muslim society from entering the Western developed world. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, these children's journals began to cover the issue of female illiteracy as one of the main obstacles to societal progress. These journals introducing the image of 'girl,' *gız*, to the strictly gendered Muslim society brought a new definition to the stage between childhood and womanhood, describing girls' position and needs.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Sidgi, *Present for Girls*, 1901; Suleiman Sani Akhundov, *Tutuqushu*, 1909; *Qorkhulu nagıllar: Ahmad va Maleika, Abbas və Zeinab, Nureddin, Qaraca qız*, 1912–1914. "Saadatemiz nadir?" *Tekamul* 9, February 17, 1907; "Shikaiet,"

In the first decade of the twentieth century, authors shifted from emphasizing boys to emphasizing girls in the children's journals. Girls began to appear next to boys as the main characters, and more importantly, there was an emergence of didactic literature on girls' schooling.⁷⁹ However, the image of a girl never appeared on any journal cover. Childhood had been perceived as synonymous with boyhood in pre-revolution Muslim Azerbaijani society. Nevertheless, children's journals advanced two important themes for discussion: the first was the girl-child deprived of modern education. The second was a critique of the traditional household education that Muslim girls received; it also stressed the necessity of public schooling. An important aspect within those debates was a recognition of the need for female teaching personnel in Muslim public schools and modern female doctors in hospitals. Also, the editors pointed to the need for educated Muslim female administrative workers, summoning young women to learn how to become telephone operators and typists.⁸⁰ The outcome of the discussion on the period between female childhood and womanhood was that the adult and children's journals spread ideas on developments in girls' public education to a larger public.

Tuti 43, 1915; Sakina Akhundova, *Elmin manfaati*, 1904; *Hagg soz aji olar*, 1906, *Galın va gayınana*, 1908 *Zavadllı chochuk*, 1911.

⁷⁹ Sakina Akhundova, *Galın va gayınana*, 1908; *Savadllı chochuk*, 1911; Shafıga Efendiieva, *Birinji mahabat*, 1909; *Iki gızlaryn sıoıbeti*, 1914.

⁸⁰ *Molla Nasreddin*, 14; 16; 1907. 8, 17, 1908.

Bringing Young Muslim Women to Education

A young woman must use freedom, granted to her by her community and education, without bringing shame to her family and society.

A. Agayev, on the establishment of the first school for Muslim girls in Baku. *Kaspii*. October 5, 1901.⁸¹

We must keep faith in one hand and progress in another.

H. Z. Tagiev. *Kaspii*, October 22, 1905.⁸²

To understand the nature of gendered change in education, it is important to understand the realities of Muslim women's lives in the upper-class households of Baku and other major cities by the twentieth century. We need to focus on the life of upper-class women because the daily life of peasant and working women is less known. Furthermore, due to Islamic norms of conduct discussed elsewhere, even the position of women from the noble families in Muslim society provides insufficient information. What is known is that before the establishment of girls' public schools, elite families provided unsystematized homeschooling for their female offspring. The girls' education was structured around age hierarchies: older women, mostly with religious training, educated younger women and girls.⁸³ The subjects introduced to female students included basic grammar in Azeri Turkish, the study of the Koran, basic arithmetic, and an introduction to the literary works of the Persian and Turkic poets. The important parts of education were housekeeping and handcrafting: making carpets and embroidery were considered principal life skills regardless of women's societal status. These self-made pieces of art were the valuable part

⁸¹ A. Agayev, "V Baku gospodin H. Z. Tagiev postroil pervuiu v Muslul'manskom mire svetskuiu shkolu dlia devochek Musul'manok," *Kaspii*, October 5, 1901.

⁸² H. Z. Tagiev, *Kaspii*, 22 October 1905.

⁸³ *Azerbaijan Etnografyası*. 2: 404–405.

of a young woman's dowry.⁸⁴ Considering the pro-Russian influence on Azerbaijani culture, some upper-class families employed European governesses and tutors to educate their daughters.⁸⁵ Even so, this was a continuation of the home-schooling method. As a result, for instance, in Elizavetpol' province alone only 1.70 percent of Muslim women were literate while men's literacy rate was 7.35 percent. City dwellers had the highest percentage: 28.33 percent for men and 10.06 percent for women. In the regions, the numbers were 4.97 percent for men and 0.75 for women who had knowledge of reading and writing. This educated strata of Azeri society were mostly clergy and nobility.⁸⁶

The first attempt to bring young Muslim women to public schooling was the Russian administration's Ministry of Public Enlightenment. In 1874, the government opened the *Bakinskaiia Mariinskaiia Zhenskaiia Gimnaziia*, *Baku Women's School named after the Empress Maria Feodorovna*, designed for all girls from aristocratic families. However, Muslim families did not welcome this innovative educational centre, and in 1900 alone the number of Muslim girls in this school, mostly Tatars, was 6 out of 283.⁸⁷ In 1885, state authorities established another educational institution for girls, called *Uchilsche Sviatoi Nini*, *Saint Nina's School*, in Elisavetpol'. The school provided training in the Russian language for government officials' daughters. In 1897 alone, there were 320 students, including 153 of Russian origin, 109 Armenians, 19 Jews, 17 Germans, 11 Georgians, 5 Poles, 9 Greeks, and only 3 Azeri Muslims.⁸⁸ In 1900, in Baku, there were three private schools run by V. Zotikova, Z. Tutova, and N.

⁸⁴ *Azerbaycan Etnografiyasi*, 1: 450–453.

⁸⁵ F. Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (London: Routledge, 2002), 67.

⁸⁶ N. A. Troinitskii, *Naseleniie imperii po perepisi 28-go ianvaria 1897 goda po uezdam, Elizavetpol'skaia Guberniia*, 8.

⁸⁷ "Bakinskaiia Mariinskaiia zhenskaiia gimnaziia," ARDTA f. 317, o. 2, d. 3, ll. 13–18.

⁸⁸ "Elizavetpol'skoie Zhenskoiee uchebnoie zavedeniie sviatoi Niny," ARDTA f. 407, o. 1. d. 6, ll. 10–13.

Khomentovskaiia for girls of different social and religious backgrounds. However, they were not popular among local Muslims either.⁸⁹

The low number of Azeri Muslim female students in all government and private learning centres was a result of their families' reluctance to send their daughters to the mixed Russian-Tatar schools because of fear of Russification and loss of *namus*, female traditional norms of morality. However, modern, educated Muslim parents demanded progressive-type schooling for their daughters, both realizing the importance of women's education to the construction of a new *millat* and for a pragmatic reason: to marry their daughters to educated and prosperous young men. At the end of the 1890s, Hasan bek Zardabi, the pedagogue and the editor of the first Azeri newspaper, introduced the project of modern Muslim female public schooling. However, its realization belongs to Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev, the oil-magnate and enlightened philanthropist, who established the first Russian-Muslim school solely for Muslim girls in Baku in 1901. H. Z. Tagiev (1823–1924), who came from a poor family, began his career as a casual laborer. Despite being an illiterate person, he made a significant contribution to the development of secular education for Azerbaijanis.⁹⁰ He was also a patron of many charitable societies. He donated a significant part of his capital from the *H. Z. Tagiev Company*, which was the fourth highest in the oil industry after the Nobel brothers, the Rothschilds, and the *Caucasus Association*, for charity.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Chastnyie Bakinskiie gimnazii,” ARDTA f. 526, o. 1. d. 1, ll. 1-3. F. 525, o. 1. d. 3, ll. 2–6.

⁹⁰ H. Z. Tagiev (1823–1924) was an Azerbaijani oil industrialist, businessman, and philanthropist of very poor origin known for his wide support of the numerous enlightenment projects. He had a nickname, “Eleven sticks,” for using ten vertical and one horizontal strips as his signature. Tagiev hired special people as readers to deliver him the latest news from the newspapers and familiarize him with world literature.

⁹¹ Manaf Suleymanov, *Azerbaijan Millionchullari: H. Z. Tagiyev* (Baku: Gandjlik Press, 1996), 10–13.



Figure 10. Haji Zeinalabdin Tagiev (1821 – 1924). AAKFD photo.

Tagiev’s project to educate young Muslim women at modern public schools was part of the modernizing discourse of the progressive intellectual and industrial elite. However, it met strong opposition from the *Shia* religious authorities who violently opposed even its discussion; they pointed to Islamic doctrines that allegedly forbid the education of female students outside of the family. To overcome this religious opposition, Tagiev sent several emissaries, *akhunds*, to the Islamic spiritual centres—Mecca, Medina, Istanbul, Mashhad, and Karbala— to obtain written permission that granting girls education did not contradict Islamic doctrines. The opposition was also fueled by the fact that the land plot chosen for the first school’s construction had previously been considered as a place to build the largest mosque in Baku.⁹²

The criticism did not disappear even after construction of the school: many conservative men attacked schoolgirls in the streets, and the students’ families faced hostility from the Muslim community as well. Between 1901 - 1903, the religious authorities continued to criticize the school

⁹² Suleymanov, *H. Z. Tagiyev*, 12–14.

during sermons at mosques, thereby stimulating social turmoil. The city's authorities declared that they would not interfere in religious matters.⁹³ Dzheiran Bairamova, a graduate of the *Tagiev school*, a future Communist and a prominent activist for Soviet gender reformation, recalled that even in 1910s, several years later after the school introduction, the members of her Baku neighborhood community, *mahala*, and relatives ostracized her father for sending his daughter to school. Thus, he stopped sending her there for some time and burned her books.⁹⁴ Thus, despite the decades-long discussion on the benefits of female education for the nation, harassment of young women attending modern school and social conflicts around the school were a significant part of Baku cultural life that continued until 1920 and beyond.

The modernist project to open the new-method public school for Muslim girls did not gain recognition from the Ministry of Public Enlightenment either. The tsarist administration did not allow the establishment of the school, pointing to the existing modern public schools for all young women in the Transcaucasian region. Thus, establishing a training centre for Muslim girls only took a decade of Tagiev's petitions directly to Tsar Alexander III and busy correspondence with bureaucrats from the Ministry of Public Enlightenment.⁹⁵ The petitions from H. Z. Tagiev to the Imperial officials illustrate, only after the death of Alexander III in 1894 and the succession to the throne of Nicolas II, could Tagiev achieve his goal. In 1896, for the royal family's coronation, Tagiev proposed considering the establishment of the school as a gift, also promising to name it after the tsarina Alexandra Fiodorovna.⁹⁶ Permission to open a school came in 1898 assigning to found and run the school solely with Tagiev's money. Tagiev invested 150,000 rubles into this

⁹³ Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition*, 67.

⁹⁴ Dzheiran Bairamova, *Vospominaniia* Lichnyi fond Dzheiran Bairamovoi (Rukopis', March 3, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d. 7, ll. 2–3.

⁹⁵ On Tagiev's active correspondence see: ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 780.

⁹⁶ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo rusско-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (otchet i protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo soveta, spisok lichnogo sostava, perepiska i drugoie)," ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 780, l. 50.

project, allocating 25,000 rubles from that amount to the building's construction.⁹⁷ The school opened its doors in 1901 and had 58 students, 35 of whom came from the poor families and received a four-year education free of charge along with the opportunity to live at the school.⁹⁸ The school, which had the official name *Bakinskoie Zhenskoie Russko-Musul'manskoie Aleksandrinskoie Uchilische, Baku Female Russian-Muslim School named after Alexandra Fiodorovna*, however, very quickly became known as the *Tagiev school*.

The new educational centre became distinct from the state public and private schools because of its student composition: only Muslim girls had the right to study there. Also, the school proposed to implement the Azerbaijani reformers' agenda to educate female students, who would someday become civic servants for the nation, on the meaning and practice of Western but not Islamic civilization. Nevertheless, some similarities between the state Russian-Tatar schools and the *Tagiev school* remained: they were both oriented towards raising good housewives and promoting traditional roles for the young Muslim women.⁹⁹ Also, this first school for Muslim girls kept certain patterns that prevailed in the household education of girls, which is reflected in the lists of courses in the Educational Program: students had handicraft classes two lessons a week.¹⁰⁰ The school did not go against traditional culture either, by emphasizing the value of the female skills needed by future wives and mothers. Instruction in the Koran for three lessons a week,

⁹⁷Rouble was the currency of the Russian Empire. In the Russian black-soil region between 1889–1913 a cow cost 34 roubles and a horse cost 45 roubles. *Rossia 1913 god. Statistiko-dokumental'nyi spravocnik*, 94; "Zaiavlenie Bakinskoi pervoi gil'dii kuptsa G. Z. Tagieva v Bakinskuiu gorodskuiu upravu," (April 29, 1896) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 780, ll. 30–32.

⁹⁸ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (otchet i protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo soveta, spisok lichnogo sostava, perepiska i drugoie)," ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 30.

⁹⁹ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (otchet i protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo soveta, spisok lichnogo sostava, perepiska i drugoie)," ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 780, ll. 38–39.

¹⁰⁰ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo sobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)," (September 13, 1914) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 45.

provided by reformist male priests, also suggests that there was no plan to break ties with Islamic norms of conduct and local family Muslim traditions. In fact, the religious study gradually decreased to two lessons per week in the final year.¹⁰¹



Figure 11. *Bakinskoe Zhenkoiie Russko-Musul'manskoie Aleksandrinskoiie Uchilische, Baku Female Russian-Muslim School named after Alexandra Fiodorovna, known as the Tagiev School, 1920. AAKFD photo.*

¹⁰¹ “Materialy o deiatel’nosti Bakinskogo zhenского russo-musul’manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo sobraniia, perepiska i drugoie),” (September 13, 1914) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 46.



Figures 11. Group picture of the female students of the *Tagiev school*. AAKFD photo.



Figure 12. Sakina Akhundova, a writer and a teacher, with the students in the sleeping chamber. Baku, 1917. AAKFD photo.



Figure 13. Shafiga Efendiieva, a journalist and writer, teaches religious studies at the *Tagiev school*, Baku, 1917. AAKFD photo.

Nevertheless, this project of girls' schooling was clearly part of a secular program, not a religious one. The modern-type curriculum included mathematics, science, and geography.¹⁰² The languages of education were Russian and Azerbaijani. French language was taught as a separate subject. The stress on mathematics, science, and languages, which students learned every day in all years, once more emphasizes the modern aspect of education.¹⁰³ Students of all levels also had music and dance classes. The school had its own theatre and cinema which the teachers used to familiarize the female students with the latest scientific, educational, and cultural achievements.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo rusko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)," (May 6, 1911) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 38.

¹⁰³ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo rusko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)," (September 13, 1914) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 46.

¹⁰⁴ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo rusko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, spisok ichitelei, perepiska i drugoie)," (January 9, 1914 – October 9, 1917) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 993, ll. 29–31.

The school was also innovative for its introduction of male teachers and a male doctor.¹⁰⁵ The school had a Western-type dress code: European-style mid-length dresses in dark blue or black with a white apron, European-styled shoes, and girls covered their heads with scarves only during religious lessons. Also, the school required students to keep hygiene norms: to brush their teeth and to take a shower with cold water. The school's doctor and nurses provided physical examinations of the female pupils once a month.¹⁰⁶ The students also had outdoor recesses and were required to play active games with a rope and a ball. The teenaged girls performed this activity in the school's unfenced side yard and attracted the attention of the public. Usually, a male crowd came to look at the female students and to express their negative judgment about the violation of the traditional norms on women's upbringing.¹⁰⁷

Despite this negative opinion from the conservative Muslims, the *Tagiev school* soon gained popularity among the progressive members of the Islamic community, and not only from residents of Baku but also from people in other Russian urban centres such as Tiflis, Vladikavkaz, and Tashkent who wished to send their daughters there. School authorities denied their requests because of limited space.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, in 1913 and 1915, this demand encouraged Tagiev to open two more schools in Baku for 400 Muslim girls in total; those girls came from local Azeri

¹⁰⁵ The school's doctor was Nariman Narimanov (1870–1925), a writer, intellectual, and political leader. In the late 1890s, he, like many other young men, received full financial assistance from H. Z. Tagiev to study medicine at the Russian university and later worked as a doctor at his school. Later a prominent Communist, he became the head of the government of Soviet Azerbaijan, the chairman of the Union Council of the Transcaucasian SFSR. He also chaired the Party Central Executive Committee of the USSR. Being a high-ranked Soviet official, he helped Tagiev and his family to escape arrest and to keep a house outside Baku after the total expropriation of all Tagiev's businesses, properties, and capital by the Bolsheviks.

¹⁰⁶ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)," (November 8, 1915) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, ll. 19–20.

¹⁰⁷ Dzheiran Bairamova, *Vospominaniia. Lichnyi fond Dzheiran Bairamovoi*" (Rukopis' March 3, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d. 7, l. 3.

¹⁰⁸ "Protokoly zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo soveta. Perepiska, ustav, spisok uchitelei o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha," (April 10, 1913–January 5, 1919) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 947, ll. 63–64.

families as well as from the North Caucasus, Central Asia, and Volga Tatar regions.¹⁰⁹ By 1918, 1,737 Muslim girls gained education at those schools.¹¹⁰ The schools operated until March 1918, the period of the Armenian atrocities committed against Azerbaijanis all over Azerbaijan. These events destabilized civil life and affected the well-being of all students and boarding schoolgirls particularly, thus, the schools stopped functioning. Tagiev himself insisted on closing the schools and keeping young women at home, pointing to the unsafe environment and the schools' inability to provide meals to students due to the abrupt end of food supplies to Baku.¹¹¹

It is important to note that several years before the schools' liquidation, these educational centres faced the problem of a lack of Muslim female teachers to instruct the girls. The first teachers were women of Tatar origin or the wives of intellectual leaders, like Khanifa Melikova Zardabi, and male instructors of Muslim faith and high societal reputation.¹¹² However, the strong need to have native teaching staff paved the road for the emergence of the first pedagogical learning centre, a teachers' college. The correspondence between Tagiev and the bureaucrats from the Ministry of Public Enlightenment revealed that this task also met strong opposition from the Russian government authorities. The official resistance to Tagiev's project to establish the pedagogical college forced Tagiev to attract some high-ranked personalities, like duchess E. A. Vorontsova-Dashkova, to lobby for his project and to obtain permission for the foundation of the

¹⁰⁹ For documents on the establishment of two more schools see: ARDTA, f. 309, o. 1, d. 816. ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 860, ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 1275.

¹¹⁰ "Svedeniia o kolichestve shkol i uchashchikhsia za 1919/20 uchebnyi god," ARDA [Azerbaijan Republic State Archive] f. 57, o. 1, d. 1125, l. 42.

¹¹¹ "Protokoly zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo soveta. Perepiska, ustav, spisok uchitelei o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha," (April 10, 1913–January 5, 1919) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 947, ll. 63–64. "Izveshcheniie Popechitel'skogo soveta uchilishcha", "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)" (September 1915–March 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 947, l. 92.

¹¹² "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie)," (January 19, 1902) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, ll. 1–3.

new institution. In one of the letters to the duchess, from February 1913, Tagiev presented himself as a loyal servant of the Russian state and used humble language in the description of his Muslim people. He also stressed the need for such an institution and appealed to the Romanov's 300-year anniversary of their accession to the Russian throne:

Your excellence,

With this letter I would like to confirm one more time my eagerness to serve the Tsar and the Fatherland. All my life, I have done my best to bring Russian and Muslim people closer to each other; this will be possible to achieve once the Muslim woman becomes literate. To realize this, I ask you to support and promote my project on the establishment of two-year pedagogical courses within the successfully operated *Bakinskoie Aleksandrinskoie Zhenskoie Russko-Musul'manskoie Uchilische*, the Baku Female Russian-Muslim School named after Alexandra Fiodorovna. The new school's mission is to prepare female teachers who will bring light, which is much needed, to Muslim girls – future wives and mothers. Moreover, the educated Muslim women will become better sisters to enlightened Russian women.

I believe that this project will pave a road to a closer interconnection of my people with the Russian nation, so beloved by my heart. With the foundation of this new pedagogical school, I solemnly mark the 300-year anniversary of the Romanov royalty, the glory of all loyal Russian and Muslim citizens.¹¹³

In 1913, Tagiev obtained permission to establish the pedagogical college under his full financial support of 100,000 rubles.¹¹⁴ He also covered teaching costs and material supplies for scientific laboratories – 7,500 rubles per year.¹¹⁵ The new pedagogical centre trained the students in *Sharia*, history, geography, handcrafting, and housekeeping for two hours a week. Subjects like

¹¹³ The letter from H. Z. Tagiev to E. A. Vorontsova-Dashkova, Baku, February 1913, "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha i otkrytii pri nem dvukhgodichnykh zhenskikh pedagogicheskikh kursov," (February 5, 1913–May 28, 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 938, l. 46.

¹¹⁴ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha i otkrytii pri nem dvukhgodichnykh zhenskikh pedagogicheskikh kursov," (February 5, 1913–May 28, 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 938, ll. 2–3.

¹¹⁵ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha i otkrytii pri nem dvukhgodichnykh zhenskikh pedagogicheskikh kursov," (February 5, 1913–May 28, 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 938, ll.31–33.

science, mathematics, and languages required from seven to ten hours of training per week.¹¹⁶ This curriculum shows a modern approach to knowledge designed to prepare the future teachers for young female Muslim students in the modern educational system.



Figure 15. Azeri female teachers, the graduates of the Pedagogical College, at the *Neshr-i Maarif* office. Baku, 1917. AAKFD photo.

The first students at this college graduated in 1915 and worked as teachers in girls' schools throughout Baku and its surrounding areas.¹¹⁷ The total number of graduates was approximately twelve each year and they became the major employees of the *Neshr-i Maarif*, the Society for Illiteracy Elimination, founded in 1908, which functioned with Tagiev's sole financial support. The importance of this pedagogical college is that it changed the traditional education system of the Muslim community significantly and gave rise to young Muslim female teachers who worked

¹¹⁶ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha i otkrytii pri nem dvukhgodichnykh zhenskikh pedagogicheskikh kursov," (February 5, 1913–May 28, 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 938, l. 44.

¹¹⁷ "Materialy o deiatel'nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul'manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha i otkrytii pri nem dvukhgodichnykh zhenskikh pedagogicheskikh kursov," (February 5, 1913–May 28, 1918) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 938, l. 58.

along with Muslim men and non-Muslim female teachers. Hence, it contributed to the destruction of the traditional gender and age-based hierarchies.

Customarily, in Azerbaijan, girls entering puberty were regarded as women; they had to be properly covered by headscarves—*hijab*, or full a body veil—*chadra*, and were considered suitable for marriage. In the Elizavetpol' province alone the statistical data on the number of Muslim married girls aged 15–16 indicates that 62.64 percent of them were married, while for married men of the same age it was only 3.70 percent. The proportion of young married Muslim women from age 17 to 19 was 86.79 percent, while the number of married men of same age was 15.52 percent.¹¹⁸ However, the graduates of the pedagogical college were the first female generation who, as the result of the new forms of education, delayed their marriages and having children. As the petitions written by the female teachers to the *Nesh-i Maarif* show, those Azeri women, regardless of their family background, became financially and socially independent.

Furthermore, the societal positions of young educated women varied significantly from that of older women. This contrast between the status of two groups of women is clearly evident in the petitions that modern female teachers wrote to *Nesh-i Maarif*, asking for salary increases, for relocation to better workplaces, for improvements to working conditions, and for extended vacations.¹¹⁹ The letters to various local government agencies from elderly women and those not trained at the modern educational centres describe them as old women in need, left without any support, and too old to find any work. Moreover, many of those women recorded their petitions

¹¹⁸ N. A. Troinitskii, *Naseleniie imperii po perepisi 28-go ianvaria 1897 goda po uezdam, Elizavetpol'skaia Guberniia*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Prosheniie v pravleniie *Neshr-i Maarif* o predostavlenii mne pozitsii v Balakhanskoie zhenskoiie uchilishche, "Lichnoie delo o sluzhbe uchitel'nitsy Bakinskogo zhenskogo uchilishcha Akhundovoi Miny. *Neshr-i Maarif*," (January 8, 1914–March 16, 1915) ARDTA f. 312, o. 2, d. 25, l. 2; Zaiivleniie v pravleniie *Neshr-i Maarif* o pereraspredelenii v novuiiu shkolu, "Lichnoie delo o sluzhbe uchitel'nitsy Bakinskogo zhenskogo uchilishcha Zeinalovoi Sekhry" (September 18–October 17, 1915) ARDTA f. 312, o.2, d. 50.

with the help of hired petition-writers at the market squares to fill the forms properly.¹²⁰ Unlike those illiterate or traditionally educated women the graduates of the school and college were always able to write about their needs and demands in the Russian and Azerbaijani languages using both the Cyrillic and Arabic scripts.¹²¹ Thus, the changes in women's public education broke down generational hierarchies and female roles in traditional education and culture and led to the loss of elderly women's status in Muslim society, leaving many of them outside of public life.

The new school system also changed the traditional social order of the urban centre. The social composition of the school and the college was diverse: the half of the female students came from lower social strata and were the first generation who received education because of Tagiev's policies to cover tuition fees and living expenses for students from underprivileged families. Previously, as discussed, traditional education was available only for upper-class girls who were not required to be the helpers in their households or to become breadwinners from an early age. Also, the first government public schools were available only to girls from rich families. Unlike these, the *Tagiev school* and the pedagogical training centre for Muslim young women provided education for girls of different social statuses and incomes. The *Ishig* journal, for example advertised not only the school but also offered a sample of how to write a letter to enroll parentless girls or those from poor families in the school.¹²² These girls were all boarding students, and thus, they sampled the fruits of modernist philosophy without any intervention from traditional family values. Hence, by providing schooling to these underprivileged young women, who had no traditional family support, both teaching institutions spread new ideologies and worldviews on

¹²⁰ "Proshenie gospodinu gorodovomu ot bednoi vdovi (bezgramotna)," September 27, 1915, ARDTA f.495, o.1, d.103, l. 162; "Zhaloba Bakinskoi domovladelitsy pissannaia s eia slov," May 8, 1916, ARDTA f. 495, 0.1, d.139, l.2.

¹²¹ "Lichnoie delo o sluzhbe uchitel'nitsy Bakinskogo zhenskogo uchilishcha Akhundovoi Miny. *Neshr-i Maarif*," (January 8, 1914–March 16, 1915) ARDTA f. 312, o. 2, d. 25, ll. 4–6; "Lichnoie delo o sluzhbe uchitel'nitsy Bakinskogo zhenskogo uchilishcha Akhundovoi Nadzhiby. *Neshr-i Maarif*," (September 4, 1913–March 2, 1915) ARDTA f. 312, o. 2, d. 26, ll. 7–8.

¹²² The Editorial column, *Ishig* 10, March 31, 1912.

female roles in society and pioneered a modern educated female elite. These new cultural characteristics, however, were not coincidental. They reflect the new urban culture that, unlike the patriarchal countryside, needed female professionals in the educational, spiritual, and health spheres.

Meanwhile, modern, educated Muslim women had adapted to the new modernizing discourse on female public roles and began to invest in public education even outside Baku. The traditional female activity for upper-class Muslim women was often to establish or repair the religious centres. There are some examples of this traditional practice: in the thirteenth century Barakat khanum donated a large amount of money for the construction of the Mardakian fortress and mosque; Tuba Shakhi khanum established a mosque in 1482; and Gevkher-aga khanum and Sakina khanum, the latter a widow of A. G. Bakikhanov, founded two mosques in the 1850s in Shusha and in Guba respectively. An outstanding position belonged to Nabat khanum Ashurbekova who established the reformed mosque in Baku in 1905; this centre, unlike traditional mosques, had two divisions for ritual services that allowed men and women to worship simultaneously.¹²³ It is the last known case when an Azerbaijani Muslim woman founded or renovated a religious centre. Since the early 1900s, the elite Azeri women preferred to be part of the process for secular enlightenment by establishing educational centres at their estates or sponsoring existing ones for children of diverse social statuses.

¹²³ L. S. Bretanitskii and B. V. Veimarn, *Iskusstvo Azerbaidzhana IV-XVIII vekov* (Moscow: Akademkniga, 1976), 40–44; Sh. Fatullaiev, *Architectural Encyclopedia of Baku* (Baku: Sharg-Garb, 2013), 130–136.



Figure 16. Hamida Javanshir. AAKFD photo.

In 1908, Hamida Javanshir (1873–1955) established a coeducational school on her family's Kizlyar estate in Karabakh, a region situated far from modern and industrial Baku. There were thirty boys and ten girls at the school who studied a single curriculum, irrespective of gender. This was a progressive approach at that time, when girls' education usually had a less scientific and more applied household curriculum. However, the school operated only for one year even though Hamida khanum provided clothing and writing supplies for them. The villagers did not send their daughters to the school preferring to keep them as the helpers in their households. Also, the school operated only when Hamida khanum was physically present at the estate; when she was absent the male and female students missed classes because of being busy at the families' farms.¹²⁴

Although the school's enlightening activity did not meet violent opposition, Hamida Khanum's other two projects on Muslim people's enlightenment outside the capital met with strong criticism. This negative attitude clearly showed the place of modern women in the patriarchal community. In 1907 Javanshir, a widow with two children, decided to marry to Dzhaliil Mamedkulizade, the famous writer, enlightener, and editor of the satirical journal *Molla*

¹²⁴ Kh. Javanshir Mamedkulizade, *Moi vospominaniia*, 34–35.

Nasreddin. However, both her relatives and her gentry neighbors from the Karabakh region expressed their opposition, declaring that a woman from a rich and prominent *bek* family could not marry a poor divorcé also known as atheist, *giaour*. They organized a military gang to open fire when her bride-groom's cortege approached the borders of their district and prevented him from entering the district, thus postponing their wedding ceremony.¹²⁵ Hamida khanum was not free in her charitable activity either. In 1906, as the organizer of the society for poor relief in the Karabakh region after the famine of 1904–1905, she was not allowed to attend the conference that discussed measures to overcome the famine's consequences. In February 1907, the local *beks* and clergy, even though they eagerly accepted her vast financial donations, banned her from the conference, pointing out that women should stay at home, leaving all important matters for men to decide because, after all, they were the only authorities in their communities.¹²⁶



Figure 17. Nazli Nadzhafova. AAKFD photo.

In 1912 another enthusiast of female education, Nazli Nadzhafova (1890–1971), a graduate of the *Tagiev school*, established the first new-method school for Muslim girls in Nakhichevan, a region situated at the border with Ottoman empire and far from multi-cultural and industrially

¹²⁵Kh. Javanshir Mamedkulizade, *Moi vospominaniia*, 24–25.

¹²⁶ Kh. Javanshir Mamedkulizade, *Moi vospominaniia*, 30.

developed Baku. Nadzhafova's initiative immediately sparked violent opposition. The local people threw stones at teachers and the school building. There were several attempts to abduct the female students. In this situation Nazli khanum hired bodyguards. However, this measure did not stop the organized harassment and after several cases of arson and an attempted murder Nazli khanum left the town and moved to Baku where she began to teach at the modern *Tagiev school*.¹²⁷ She returned to Nakhichevan only after its Sovietization, in the 1920s, and became a prominent leader of the Soviet campaign to emancipate Muslim women until her arrest during the period of the Stalinist purges, in 1937.¹²⁸



Figure 18. Maryam Bairamalibekova. AAKFD photo.

Maryam Bairamalibekova (1898–1988), who was the daughter of Azerbaijani reformer and journalist Teimur Bairamalibekov, met similar hostile opposition. Being a graduate of the *Tagiev school* and *Saint Nina* Secondary Boarding School, she was admitted into Moscow State

¹²⁷ “Materialy o deiatel’nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul’manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo sobraniia, perepiska i drugoie),” (Otchet za 1912–13 god) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 809, l. 13.

¹²⁸ “Zasluzhennyye uchitelia AzSSR,” ARDA f. 873, o. 1, d. 1, l. 3. F. 873, o. 1, d. 3, l. 3.

University's Department of Medicine in 1917.¹²⁹ However, the Russian Revolution's events destroyed her plans to continue her education and she returned to her hometown, Lenkoran, a border municipality with Iran. In 1917, she opened the first all-girls secular school there, named *Unas, Girls*. Education was in the Russian language and the curriculum included drama, choir, and music. In 1919, Bairamalibekova founded the *Lenkoran Women's Charity Association*. However, her activity was not widely appreciated; the school closed its doors after a year of existence and the society ceased to exist several months after its foundation.¹³⁰ She welcomed the Soviet-type emancipation program and worked as a teacher and a promoter of the Soviet campaign to eliminate illiteracy among Muslim women before her arrest in the mid-1930s. After 1950, she continued her teaching career.¹³¹



Figure 19. Sakina Akhundova. AAKFD photo.

Female writing activity was not approved of in the areas outside modern Baku either. Not surprisingly, the example of Sakina Akhundova's (1865–1927) life shows how it was dangerous

¹²⁹ B. B. Kerimov, *Yermi esrin evvelirinde Lenkoranda musul'man giz mektebinin tarikhindan* (Baku: Baki Universitenin kheberleri, 2011), 104.

¹³⁰ Kerimov, *Yermi esrin evvelirinde Lenkoranda musul'man giz mektebinin tarikhindan*, 107–108.

¹³¹ Kerimov, *Yermi esrin evvelirinde Lenkoranda musul'man giz mektebinin tarikhindan*, 110–115.

for Muslim women to promote female rights outside Baku. Being the daughter of poet Hedat bek Akhundov Fedaii, she received a good education at home and began to write plays about the ignorant position of Muslim women. Later, she received support from her husband to perform them on stage in her hometown, Cuba. However, her activity was met with aggressive disapproval and physical attacks against her family for the violation of patriarchal norms of conduct. In 1906, during one of those attacks, a religious fanatic named Ali murdered her husband. Sakina khanum was able to hide in Baku.¹³² Soon, she became a teacher at the Tagiev school and organized a troupe from among the school girls who performed her plays.¹³³ The most staged play was *Elmin Manfaati, The Benefits of Science*, written earlier, in 1904.¹³⁴ After the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, Sakina khanum returned to her hometown, Cuba, and helped to establish a modern theatre and printing house there. In 1923, she became a co-author of the new Turkic alphabet based on Latin script.¹³⁵



Figure 20. Shafiga Efendiieva. AAKFD photo.

¹³² I. S. Kerimov, *Stanovlenie i razvitie azerbaidzhanskogo teatra: konets 19-nachalo 20 vekov* (Baku: Elm, 1991), 263–286.

¹³³ “Materialy o deiatel’nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul’manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie),” (Otchet za 1908 god) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 22.

¹³⁴ “Materialy o deiatel’nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-musul’manskogo Aleksandrinskogo uchilishcha (protokoly, zasedaniia pedagogicheskogo cobraniia, perepiska i drugoie),” (Otchet za 1908 god) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1, d. 805, l. 24.

¹³⁵ Kerimov, *Stanovlenie i razvitie azerbaidzhanskogo teatra*, 292.

Another female writer, Shafiga Efendiieva (1882–1959), who in her literary works argued that Muslim women’s minor position was a direct result of seclusion and a lack of education, faced hostile opposition as well.¹³⁶ In the period from 1903 to 1917, she wrote for the journals *Dabistan*, *Maktab*, and *Achig Soz* about the need to improve Muslim women’s societal roles. Along with this, she gave advice on child-rearing and education. She was also a teacher at the *Tagiev school* and was the highest paid female instructor with a salary of 1100 rubles a year, while others received around 700.¹³⁷

Outside the school, Efendiieva popularized ideas about women’s education and women’s rights, and she took part in the first Congress of Muslim Teachers in 1906 and the Congress of Muslims in Transcaucasia in 1917. In both cases, she broke the social norms of Islamic society by attending meetings without a veil and giving a speech to the male audience. Such acts provoked negative reactions towards her and other female activists. After 1920, she cooperated with the Soviet regime and acted as an activist for women’s emancipation. Efendiieva became an active leader in quest for Muslim women’s enlightenment. She worked at the “Ali Bairamov” Club supervising projects for illiteracy elimination. She continued her writing activity, contributing to the journal *Sharg Gadini* and being the head of the fiction department and the journal’s executive administrator. The Soviet government praised her highly and called her the first Muslim woman journalist and philologist. Until 1932, the Soviet authorities assigned her to represent all Azeri Muslim women at the various conferences and congresses in Baku, Moscow, and other Soviet cities. From the mid-1930s, she led a quiet life in Baku, working at the public school until her

¹³⁶ Shafiga Efendiieva, “Bizim huguglar va siaset,” *Shargi-Rus* 3, January 1903.

¹³⁷ “Materialy o deiatel’nosti Bakinskogo zhenskogo russko-Musul’anskogo uchilishcha, spisok uchitelei,” (November 13-17, 1913) ARDTA f. 309, o. 1. d. 971, l.16.

death on July 29, 1959. Unlike many other Azeri activists with pre-revolution achievements, she was not purged and did not perish during the years of Great Terror in the 1930s.¹³⁸

These examples of female activity outside the modern urban environment, including Baku and other cities, illustrate that the new trends in women's education that made them agents of modernity did not bring them universal recognition from traditional Islamic society. In 1911, Nariman Narimanov, a doctor at the *Tagiev school*, a writer, and a leading Communist, explained the reluctance of rural Muslim communities to accept the changes in women's societal position as the direct result of the elitist nature of gender reform performed by the Baku-established reformers, mostly through the Russian-language print media:

In the last several years we have witnessed the emergence of men of letters who, in their preaching, try to educate our nation. These intellectuals go from one radical position: to abandon religion and traditions, to another one: to fight *giaour* influence. In this essay I want to highlight the position of those who aim to modernize our society. These proselytizers tell us that our nation is not civilized. They proclaim that our women are not good enough to raise decent children. However, after reading all these articles I want to ask a question: to whom do they address their thoughts? To the illiterate peasant? To the old-fashioned priest, who considers all modern ideas as punishment sent by the devil for our sins? To the centuries-long deprived Muslim woman? If they write to 20–30 educated male Muslims, then, I want to assure them that this part of the nation understands the gloomy realities of our society. However, concentrating their activity in the Baku and Tiflis salons, they distanced themselves from the common people by articulating their opinion solely in the Russian language.¹³⁹

In another essay published earlier in 1896 in the newspaper *Kaspii*, Narimanov proposed measures to improve women's position through the total enlightenment of the Azeri population:

To enlighten our illiterate nation, we need to promote our thoughts in the popular Azerbaijani language, we must go to people with short pamphlets and explain to them the negative role that traditions and the spiritual influence of some radical priests play in our society. We need to enlighten commoners regarding women's modern education first and then open schools and throw the *chadra* from women. We must instruct them endlessly not

¹³⁸ Sabir Giandzhali, *Mekhshur muallim*, Azerbaijan Muallimi, October 25–31, 2002.

¹³⁹ N. Narimanov, "Eshche o zhenskom voprose sredi musul'man," *Prikaspiiskii krai*, 1911.

from the salons in an alien language but by becoming a part of their communities and showing examples of an enlightened life.¹⁴⁰

Thus, this chapter has demonstrated the modern ideas about female education to bring Azerbaijani Muslims to the level of progressive Europe associating modernity with European civilization. It also examined the project, realized by the enlightened philanthropist and oil-tycoon H. Z. Tagiev, that pioneered a new type of education for Muslim young women. The *Tagiev school* and other training centres shifted traditional female education from homeschooling into modern public education and nurtured female teaching mentors for modern-type female schools. These modern training institutions prepared young Muslim women to work in pro-Western rather than in traditional Islamic environments.

The innovations contributed to ending generational and gender hierarchies that prevailed between women in homeschooling and the whole Muslim society. The school boarding system for underprivileged female students broke the societal order by mixing the representatives of all classes. Also, it unified them by importing modern common knowledge and work experience. Thus, the innovations in female education changed urban Muslim young women's societal roles and promoted them as the new agents of societal modernization. The mass media actively propagandized the image of a well-schooled Muslim woman as an instrumental political actor towards societal transformation to create a new *millat*. However, modernist rhetoric, controlled by the male intellectual elite, articulated only the revolutionized household roles for women, giving them autonomy only within the family. Azerbaijani Muslim women did not gain much power to control their lives and continued to act in accordance with societal expectations.

¹⁴⁰ N. Narimanov, "Neskol'ko slov o pishishchikh musul'manskikh intellegentakh," *Kasprii*, February 1, 1896.

Along with that, the discussion about women's education did not change gender roles in the local Islamic community for several reasons. First, print media's target was mostly the urban and Russian-educated strata of Azerbaijani society that supported the image of a "new woman." Second, as discussed, the short life of all women's and children's print media left Muslim women without an arena to voice their concerns and opinions, concentrating it again in the hands of the male intellectual elite. Thus, Muslim women did not gain considerable authority because they had an arena to express their voices only for a noticeably short period: the life-span of both the women's journal, *Ishig*, and the children's journals rarely exceeded one or two years. Third, to voice their thoughts, Muslim women always had to rely on male patronage that granted them the desired freedom of expression at the modern educational centres of Baku. These educational institutions became islands of enlightenment, while the rest of Muslim society remained hostile to their activity. This regional antagonism towards the new Muslim women's activity can be explained by the fact that the Azerbaijani modernizers expressed their ideas on Muslim women's enlightenment and on the end of seclusion mostly in independent Russian-language print media that was never published and rarely distributed outside Baku. Hence, the discussion of the 1890s–1920s on women's enlightenment and the abolition of patriarchal traditions was limited only to Baku and its surrounding areas. The wider traditional Islamic society did not recognize the proposed reforms about the change towards Muslim women's societal position.

Chapter Three

The Bolshevik Revolution and the New Bid for Women's Rights in Azerbaijan

Not a single bourgeois republic, not even the most advanced one, has given the feminine half of humanity either full legal equality with men or freedom from the guardianship and oppression of men... Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!
Lenin V. I., *Pravda*, 249, November 6, 1919.¹

On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, October 1917, the question of the necessity of educating Muslim girls and women had been the important societal factor to overcome the assumed cultural backwardness. Didactic literature and new print media played a critical role in shaping the pre-revolutionary discourse about the benefits of women's education. The introduction of modern public education changed the gender and age hierarchies in traditional urban Muslim society. After sovietization, although the pre-revolution discourse became excluded from the official Muslim women's emancipation program, the main arguments about educated women as the nucleus of the enlightened *millat* continued to shape Azeri's new Soviet discourse about women.

This chapter demonstrates the political and cultural transformation from colonial Russian Azerbaijan into Soviet Azerbaijan. It examines the Soviet state's methods in changing Muslim women's position after the brief period of independence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic between 1918 and 1920. It also studies the transformation of many leading pre-revolution female activists for Muslim women's emancipation into loyal Communists, and their central role in political and cultural life. The Bolsheviks proclaimed mass education as an important Communist

¹ Rech' tov, Lenina po sluchaiu vtoroi godovshchiny revoliutsii Bolshevikov, *Pravda*, 249, November 6, 1919. Lenin V. I., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Progress, 1965, vol. 30), 121.

Party agenda for social transformation. Moreover, the Bolsheviks stressed that Muslim women's education was a major factor in conquering common illiteracy and ending patriarchal traditions and thus, modernizing Muslim society. This Soviet discourse echoed the late-Imperial Azeri reformers' program. I argue that the Azeri male and female intellectuals and politicians believed in adjusting their pre-revolution agenda for societal modernization to Bolshevik state policy and, thus, creating a new Azerbaijani *millat*.

Azeri Women during the Period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic

Love for a motherland begins with love to a mother!
A mother is the first person to show to her sons(!) the
beauty of their country, but if a woman is a slave in
her community, she will foster slaves who are
ignorant to the fate of their country. Those who
oppose Muslim women's efforts to obtain and defend
their rights are traitors to Azerbaijan and its *millat*.²
Shafiga Efendiieva, *Azerbaijan* 211, June 25, 1919.

The Russian Revolution of February 1917 brought not only an end to the Russian empire but also promises of religious, cultural, and political freedoms. The new Russian government, the Provisional Government, introduced the right to vote and to be elected to women and men equally.³ In Azerbaijan, the collapse of colonial rule gave full rise to many political organizations that emerged earlier during the period of liberalization after the first Russian Revolution of 1905. Those parties, Hummet, Adalat, and Musavat, advocated ideas of progress on the platforms of European and Russian social democracy. By 1917, Musavat, under the leadership of Mamed Emin

² Shafiga Efendiieva, "Vatan bizim sevgili anamızdır," *Azerbaijan* 211, June 25, 1919.

³ *Vozzvanie*, Provisional Committee of the State Duma, *Izvestiia* (March 3, 1917 in old style Russian calendar. March 16, 1917 in new style calendar.)

Rasulzade, was the largest party in Azerbaijan. Baku, with its large proletariat population employed in the oil industry, was an important political centre of the Bolshevik Party. Bolsheviks established a branch in the city along with the only publishing house to issue the party's newspaper called *Iskra, Spark*.⁴ Consequently, between December 1917 and August 1918, the power in Baku belonged to the Bolsheviks who organized *Bakinskii Sovet*, Baku Commune. Headed by the Armenian Communist Stepan Shaumian, the Baku Commune consisted of 35 commissars mostly of Armenian and Russian ethnicity. Two of the commissars were the Azeri Communists Meshadi Azizbekov and Mir Khasan Vezirov.⁵

For the Azeri population of Baku such political power, represented by the distinct political and ethnic culture in their own land, produced significant troubles. The situation also worsened when hundreds of Russian soldiers and officers returning from the First World War fronts settled in Baku, trying to escape from or to form an opposition to the Bolshevik power in Russia. Those unemployed, single, and homeless men significantly increased the already large number of city dwellers who suffered from food shortage and insecurity.⁶ These political and economic hardships provoked ethnic tensions. In March 1918, the Baku Commune's military forces used heavy artillery to attack the Azeri neighborhoods of Baku because of a perceived plot to overthrow Bolshevik power and for hiding Russian White officers. This attack was followed by killings, lootings, and burnings of the Muslim part of Baku's population by the Armenian Dashnak military gangs.⁷ The three days of massacres, now known as the *March Days*, resulted in thousands of

⁴ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 135. P. A. Azizbekova, A. Mnatsakanian, and M. Traskunov, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochenie vlasti sovetov v Zakavkaz'e* (Baku: Azerneshr, 1969), 15.

⁵ Azizbekova, Mnatsakanian, and Traskunov, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochenie vlasti sovetov v Zakavkaz'e*, 13–18.

⁶ Azizbekova, Mnatsakanian, and Traskunov, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochenie vlasti sovetov v Zakavkaz'e*, 89–92.

⁷ Postanovlenie Natsional'nogo Soveta Azerbaidzhana ob okazanii pomoshchi zhertvam besporiadkov (July 30, 1918) ARDA f. 51, o. 2, d. 185, l. 9.

Azeris losing their lives or fleeing the city, leaving it and its surroundings under the absolute control of the Baku Commune.⁸

Meanwhile, in May 1918, Azeri political and cultural leaders established a government under the leadership of the Musavat Party in Ganja, an ancient city of predominantly Azeri population. The government proclaimed the establishment of an independent state, *Azerbaijan Khalg Jumhuriyeti*, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic [ADR].⁹ In September 1918, the ADR government moved to Baku, which had been liberated from the Bolsheviks by the united military forces of the Ottoman and the British governments. Between 1918 and 1920, ADR leadership worked under strong pressure from various external and domestic forces. The British military army, under the command of General Thomson, remained in Azerbaijan and tried to gain control over the oil industry and a transit route to Iran. In 1918, the newly formed Republic of Armenia invaded historical Azeri lands in Karabakh, with support from Bolshevik Russia, killing and displacing thousands of Azeris.¹⁰ Thus, in July 1918, the ADR government announced the introduction of martial law in the territory of the republic.¹¹ Also, the Red Army, fighting with the remnants of the White Army in the North Caucasus, threatened the Northern borders of Azerbaijan. Moreover, the Bolsheviks actively intervened in the internal affairs of the ADR by having many active Communists in Azerbaijan who even worked as undercover agents at the Parliament.¹² Eventually, in April of 1920, the Red Army entered Azerbaijan, defeated the Musavat government, and established Bolshevik rule.

⁸ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 116–117.

⁹ *Azerbaidzhanskaia Demokraticheskaiia Respublika Zakonodatel'nye Akty (Sbornik Dokumentov)* (Baku: Glavnoie Arkhivnoie Upravleniie pri Kabinete Ministrov Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki, 1998), 7–8.

¹⁰ “Zasedanie Natsional'nogo Soveta Azerbaidzhana” (November 20, 1918) ARDA f. 894, o. 10, d. 169, ll. 19–20.; Postanovlenie ot 13 Iulia 1918 goda. F. 51, o. 2, d. 185, l. 8.

¹¹ “Postanovlenie ot 12 Iulia 1918 goda o vvedenii voennogo polozheniia” (July 12, 1918) ARDA f. 100, o. 2, d. 7, ll. 23–24.

¹² D. Bairamova, *Moi Vospominaniia* (Lichnyi fond D. Bairamovoi) (March 3, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d. 7, l. 85.

Nevertheless, during its brief existence the ADR regime realized many of its ideas about societal transformation. The Musavat government introduced the Azeri language as the official language.¹³ In September 1919, it established the first higher education centre in Azerbaijan, Baku State University.¹⁴ The young republic opened a four-year college in Baku, to train women as civil servants.¹⁵ Along with this, the Musavat government established a *Zhenskaiia Uchitel'skaia Seminaria*, Female Pedagogical College, in Baku.¹⁶ In January 1920, the government sent one hundred male students to study and receive a higher education at European universities.¹⁷ The government kept control over civic affairs, leaving to *Sharia* the responsibility to control Muslim family and women's rights. However, the discourse on women's changing societal roles was not the political agenda of the ADR administration. The Musavat government did not issue any resolutions to end veiling, polygyny, child marriage, or female seclusion.¹⁸ Women's rights were not an important subject for the Bolshevik members of the short-lived Baku Commune, December 1917–August 1918.¹⁹ Thus, since 1917, Azeri women alone continued their pre-revolution struggle for their rights and freedoms.

Between May 1–11, 1917, Muslims of the former empire organized the All-Russia Muslim Congress in Moscow to discuss their political and cultural future. Tatar Muslim women were the active advocates in the promotion of their rights and freedoms at this congress. Month earlier, on

¹³ “Ukazy Ministerstva Prosveshcheniia” (May 8, 1919) ARDA f. 51, o.2, d. 6.

¹⁴ “Materialy ob organizatsii gosudarstvennogo universiteta v gorode Baku” (May 21, 1919) ARDA f. 51, o. 4, d. 13. F. 895, o. 3, d. 73, ll. 55–56.

¹⁵ “Ukaz Ministerstva Prosveshcheniia ob otkrytii 4-klassnogo zhenskogo professional'nogo uchilishcha” (October 2, 1919) ARDA f. 51, o.4, d. 2.

¹⁶ “Postanovlenie pravitel'stva Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki ob otkrytii odnoi zhenskoi uchitel'skoi seminarii v gorode Baku” (February 2, 1920) ARDA f. 51, o. 4, d. 4.

¹⁷ “Delo ob otpravke abiturientov na uchebu za granitsu na kazennyi schet dlia zavershenia vysshego obrazovaniia” (January 16, 1920) ARDA f. 51, o. 3, d. 40.

¹⁸ *Azerbaidzhanskaia Demokraticheskaia Respublika. Zakonodatel'nye Akty*, 1–824.

¹⁹ A. Dubner, *Bakinskii proletariat v gody revoliutsii (1917–1920)* (Baku: AZGIZ, 1931), 80–93; S. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 2 vols (Moskva: Politizdat, 1978), 2:130–140.

April 23, 1917, the Tatar female activist organized the All-Russia Muslim Women's Congress in Kazan. The female delegates focused on discussion of their rights within Islamic law. They issued a proposal entitled *Zhenskii Vopros, The Woman Question*, and sent it for discussion at the All-Russia Muslim Congress. The proposal included many important improvements in Muslim women's social and cultural positions. They argued for better protection for women in marriage and divorce. The female activists strove to grant women the right to initiate divorce. They also tried to abolish child marriage, indicating that physically and psychologically undeveloped girls die or give birth to weak and ill babies which is a tragedy for families and for the nation as a whole. They demanded a change to the minimum age for marriage to sixteen.²⁰

The most important problem that the *Women Question's* authors addressed was polygyny, which they considered a harmful aspect of Muslim social life that should be eliminated.²¹ Another important question that the female delegates addressed was how to implement the right to vote for Muslim women. Clearly understanding that exercising the recently granted right to vote was problematic in the gender-segregated Islamic society, they called for separate male-free booths, so that women and men would not mix. Nevertheless, the Congress did not introduce any regulations to implement this practice for gender-segregated spaces.²² The General Congress of Muslims of Russia recognized women's right to equality with men in its final resolution: this document, however, did not legalize the ban of polygyny, early marriages, and veiling.²³

Azeri intellectuals and political leaders from Baku, such as Ali Mardan bek Topchibashev and Mamed Emin Rasulzade, played active roles at the Congress. They did not propose any

²⁰ Sagit Faizov, *Dvizhenie Musul'manok Rossii za prava zhenshchin v 1917 g.: stranitsy istorii* (Nizhnii Novgorod, 2005), 25–28.

²¹ *Protokollar* (Petrograd: Imanat, 1917), 201 - 202.

²² On the debates about the women's rights, see: *Protokollar*, 201- 202; 335-350.

²³ *Protokollar*, 380–382.

projects about Muslim women's emancipation, instead, they focused on the political matters that separated All-Russia Muslims at the Congress. There were two groups that emerged at the All-Russia Muslim Congress. One group stood for a unitary Russian state, which included all entities of the former empire. Another group supported federation, meaning that the Russian Empire would be divided into autonomous but federated entities. Rasulzade called for territorial autonomy, basing his arguments on the national and cultural peculiarities of Russian Turkic peoples. He argued that Turkic peoples could easily administer their own internal affairs.²⁴ Thus, focusing on political matters, the Azeri delegation did not make any contribution to the discussion about Muslim women's emancipation.

There is no archival or periodical evidence that Azeri women participated in this All-Russia Muslim Congress. However, the periodical material of this period demonstrates that Azeri women were inspired by this movement and defended their rights at other socio-political meetings. On March 11, 1917, the Baku Muslim Women's Benevolent Society organized a public event to discuss methods of implementation for the newly acquired civil and political rights of women in Muslim society. Sakina Akhundova, a famous dramaturg and a teacher at the *Tagiev school*, was the keynote speaker at this event. In her speech, she highlighted the issue that Muslim women were forced to withdraw from any public activity by the radical clergy, who, like many other political and social groups, became very active after the February Revolution that brought freedoms of expression to the Imperial population.²⁵

From April 15–20, 1917, Shafiga Efendiieva, Sara Vezirova, and Sara Talishinskaia participated in the First Congress of South Caucasia Muslims in Baku. They aroused hostility by announcing their agenda to end women's societal isolation, polygyny, and veiling by appearing

²⁴ *Protokollar*, 119–121.

²⁵ "Svetskaia khronika goroda Baku," *Kaspii*, March 12, 1917.

without veils. In their speech, they described the ignorant position of Muslim women. Particularly, Efendiieva argued for change by suggesting the introduction of more modern schools for all young women and a theatre that could serve as a forum to condemn the societal ills. These unveiled female delegates also demanded equal rights with men in social and political life to work for the benefit of their nation. Their speeches, as noted, being delivered by unveiled Muslim women, stimulated strong criticism from Baku Islamic priests headed by the Baku's *qazi*, a judge of a *Sharia* court, Aga Muhamad Karim, who denounced them as morally corrupted. The clerics also demonstrated opposition to the Congress's resolution to discuss the female question. However, those men who supported gender reforms and their female advocates stood guard over these women. They interrupted the radical priests and escorted Efendiieva, Vezirova, and Talishinskaia to their houses for safety reasons.²⁶

Nevertheless, the conservative members of Azeri society, inspired by the radical clergy's proclamations that the Congress legalized abolition of the veil, interrupted the Congress' activity for several days. Moreover, these members of the radical religious opposition organized protest marches. The protests resulted in street fighting, broken glass windows in public buildings, and physical attacks on Muslim women in the streets. During those April days, fanatics threw stones at every unveiled Muslim woman. The movement's main characteristic was to forcefully remove European-style shoes from every Muslim woman as a symbolic act to end the hegemony of Western culture.²⁷ As Ayna Sultanova recalled, in a panic, Azeri women bought traditional shoes, wooden clogs, and *chadras* in order to continue to go to their places of work and study.²⁸

²⁶ "Yashasın qadın azadlığı! Hiurriyyet!" deyerek tribunadan enir. *Açıq sioz* 451, April 16, 1917.

²⁷ "Bakinskaia zhizn'," *Kaspıi*, April 26, 1917; *Kaspıi*, April 30, 1917.

²⁸ A. Sultanova, *Ayna Sultanova* (Baku: Azerneshr, 1976), 11.

However, despite the extreme opposition they faced, Azeri women continued their public activity. On May 21, 1917, for the first time, Azeri Muslim women exercised their right to vote in the campaign to elect members to the Baku Food Supply Committee. The Committee was responsible for food distribution among city dwellers. Baku, like many other places of that time, suffered from food shortages because the events of WWI and the February Revolution resulted in a ruined economy. During that election campaign, Muslim women, for unspecified reasons, elected only the Azeri male candidates and neglecting the female candidates of Russian origin. This act disappointed the city's Russian feminists, who claimed that historically women were better at food distribution because they had experience allocating food in their households. This criticism produced fierce debates between Russian and Azeri female activists on the pages of the newspaper *Kaspii*. The Russian feminists blamed Muslim women for their passivity and called them "an ignorant flock."²⁹ The Muslim female activists defended themselves, pointing to numerous violations during the election campaign, such as late notifications, the lack of access to monitoring of the election process, the deficiency of information about the agenda of the Baku Food Supply Committee, and insufficient support from the "civilized Russian feminists."³⁰ This debate illustrates that the female activists of Baku city were separated by their ethnicity and religion and thus did not coordinate their work towards equality with men. In July of 1917, the Muslim women also voted to elect members to the Committee of Baku Public Associations. However, among the thirty-three newly elected members, there were no female representatives either, even of Russian nationality.³¹

²⁹ "Iz zhizni i pressy musul'man," *Kaspii*, May 24, 1917; "Bakinskaia zhizn'," *Kaspii*, June 2, 1917.

³⁰ "Bakinskaia khronika," *Kaspii*, June 7, 1917.

³¹ "Po Kavkazu i Zakaspiiu," *Kaspii*, July 14, 1917.

Shafiga Efendiieva, a prominent journalist and a teacher at the *Tagiev school*, wrote article after article encouraging Muslim women to exercise their right to vote. In her writing she supported the appeals of those Muslim women who demanded the right to vote granted by the Provisional Government by establishing male-free voting stations.³² Particularly, she increased her pressure on the authorities after the establishment of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, stressing the pivotal role of every educated woman participating in socio-political life during the time of national independence.³³ In October 1917, Efendiieva strongly criticized the passivity of many Muslim women and appealed to their consciousness in one of her articles:

If we, Muslim women, do not take the future of our lives and social well-being into our hands we will regret it, because we will again have a life of those walking dead. It is time to proclaim that we know what to say, we know how to reform our public life and future. We are not only men's comrades, spouses, mothers, and the guardians of their homes. We are human beings! The nation's development is in the revival of femininity. Our nation will never prosper without granting freedom to Muslim girls and women. The future of our *millat* depends on the recognition of our rights by the state.³⁴

Efendiieva connected women's rights with the freedom and fate of the ADR. She wrote that only free women could raise free citizens. Efendiieva, in her article entitled *İslamların, Türklerin, Islamic, Turkic*, appealed to Muslim women to awaken and demand their right to education as the only road to freedom. She compared women's traditional role with women's position under Islam and argued that Islam does not violate traditional women's equality with men by allowing Muslim women to have access to education.³⁵ In 1919, Efendiieva wrote, in an article entitled *Yol Esnasında Giorduklerim, I have seen them on the road*, about the urgent need to continue the

³² "Gadin sechkisi," *Achiq sioz* 593, October 20, 1917; "Sechki va gadinlar," *Achiq sioz* 598, October 26, 1917; "Yol esnasında giorduklerim," *Azerbaijan*, 170, May 1, 1919.

³³ "Yol esnasında giorduklerim," *Azerbaijan* 170, May 1, 1919; "Dagestan gunu," *Azerbaijan* 173, May 6, 1919; "İslamların, Türklerin," *Azerbaijan* 181, May 15, 1919; "Teshkilatın gadinlara tesiri," *Azerbaijan* 194, May 28, 1919; "Milli bairam va qadinlarımız," *Azerbaijan* 196, June 5, 1919; "Vatan bizim sevgili anamızdır," *Azerbaijan* 211, June 25, 1919; "Khanımlarımıza muide," *Azerbaijan* 302, September 22, 1919.

³⁴ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Sechki va gadinlar," *Achiq sioz* 598, October 26, 1917.

³⁵ Shafiga Efendiieva, "İslamların, Türklerin," *Azerbaijan* 181, May 15, 1919.

practice of female public education that was interrupted by recent events in the country. In this article, she recalled her schooling at her father's private school named *Tekamul, Evolution*, in Sheki. She described many Muslim girls' desire to become educated by studying at her father's school. However, there was not an adequate number of modern-trained female teachers to instruct them. As a solution, Efendiieva's father employed her as a teacher at the age of fourteen. She concluded that the state should pay attention to this shortcoming and promote female education.³⁶

Efendiieva praised the establishment of the ADR as a democratic power that would abandon old traditions and would pave the road to an egalitarian society.³⁷ Like many other Azeris, Efendiieva left Azerbaijan to escape the series of devastations in March 1918 and found a safe place in the Ottoman empire. She returned in 1919 when, with the help of the Ottoman military forces under Nuri Pasha's command, Azerbaijan became free from the Armenian bands raiding across the country and Bolshevik power in Baku.

Efendiieva argued that women played the important roles during that period of political, military, and economic catastrophe. By establishing many charity organizations, women reduced the hardships faced by their people and also united the nation, setting an example of true patriotism for men. She stressed that Azeri women had proven their importance during that time of socio-economic crisis and thus, must be fully liberated from political and religious restraints.³⁸ She supported this claim by providing information about several charitable organizations established and run by Azeri women. For instance, since 1916 the Muslim Women's Benevolent Society of Ganja helped those Muslim families whose male members were at the front of WWI.³⁹ Since 1919, Efendiieva herself was a member of the Baku Muslim Women's Benevolent Society. She wrote

³⁶ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Yol Esnasında Giorduklerim," *Azerbaijan* 170, May 1, 1919.

³⁷ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Milli bairam va qadınlarımız," *Azerbaijan* 196, June 5, 1919.

³⁸ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Teshkilatın qadınlara tesiri," *Azerbaijan* 194, May 28, 1919.

³⁹ "Po Kavkazu i Zakaspiu," *Kaspii*, January 3, 1917.

that the society's mission was to support orphans and help them to have access to education. In one of her articles, she wrote that during the winter of 1919 alone, the society helped to provide clothing and shoes for 102 parentless children.⁴⁰

In the years between 1918 and 1920, Efendiieva also was an active member of the Muslim Women's Society *Esirgeme Derneii*, *The Society of the Guardians*. The society helped the displaced Muslim women and children of Azerbaijan and the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman empire to settle in the territories of Azerbaijan and Anatolia after they escaped the massacres performed by Armenian and Balkan Christians. The *Esirgeme Derneii* society, being under the patronage of the wife of Enver Pasha, princess Naciie Sultan, provided food and shelter and helped find jobs for the displaced women to support their families. Efendiieva, like other prominent members such as Sitar khanum Agayeva, the wife of Akhmed bek Agayev, Shafiga Gasprinski, the wife of the Prime Minister of the ADR Nassib bek Usubbekov, and others thrived while easing the hardships of female lives and to benefit their *millat*.⁴¹ Hence, long before the Sovietization of Azerbaijan in April 1920 and the organization of the Communist Party's Women's Division, *Zhenotdel*, established in October 1920, Azeri women had a history of founding women's organizations and a record of struggle for equal rights with men. With the establishment of Bolshevik power, Communist leaders welcomed those female activists to join the Women's Division, *Zhenotdel*.

⁴⁰ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Izhari-teshekkur," *Azerbaijan* 219, July 8, 1919.

⁴¹ Shafiga Efendiieva, "Teshkilatın gadınlara tesiri," *Azerbaijan* 194, May 28, 1919.

The Advance of the Soviet Azerbaijani Woman

By attracting Muslim women to schools, we will water the [cultural] deserts of Azerbaijan and turn it into a civilized country. Azerbaijan will be a model republic for the whole East.⁴²

M. Guliyev, the Commissar of Enlightenment. September 6, 1929.

The Bolsheviks' pursuit of ethnic and gender equality supplemented with ideological indoctrination secured them support among various segments of the former Russian Imperial population. One of the first legal acts issued by the Bolshevik regime was to grant women equal rights with men across the former Russian empire. When one thousand female delegates met at the First All-Russian Congress of Worker and Peasant Women in Moscow in November 1918, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Party, personally welcomed the delegates and emphasized the role of women in ongoing societal transformation. The Congress introduced the Women's Sections, *Zhensektsii*, that were subordinated to the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) [RCP(b)], under the leadership of Aleksandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, and Varvara Moirova.⁴³ On 2 October 1919, the Bolshevik government reorganized the Women's Sections into the Women's Department of the Secretariat of the RCP(b) Central Committee, *Zhenotdel*, headed by Inessa Armand. The local sections of the new department had to carry out female emancipation reforms.

⁴² M. Guliyev, "VI umumiy Azerbayjan Sovetler gurultayinda respublikada medani guruiligi meselelari haqqinda AzSSR Xalq Maarif komissary ioldash M. Guliyev me'rusesi," *Vestnik arxivov AzSSR*, 1975 1–2. D. 98. 171–174.

⁴³ Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 63; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860 – 1930*, 329–331; G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 209.

Zhenotdel supervised the most important aspects of women's lives: from political indoctrination and legal assistance to the private spheres of female health, education, running of households, and childcare. *Zhenotdel* sought to convey the Bolshevik message of female emancipation to all women regardless of their educational and social status. *Zhenotdel* coordinated the women's journals, such as *Kommunistka*, *Rabotnitsa*, and *Krest'ianka*,⁴⁴ organized public rallies and women's clubs, and sent female representatives for a three-month apprenticeship at the *Zhenotdel*'s centres in Moscow where they learned how to become effective liaisons between those centres and the female residents of their home communities.⁴⁵

The Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*, organized in October 1920 at the Second Congress of the Azerbaijani Communist Party [AzCP(b)], was under the umbrella of the *Zhenotdel* of the Caucasus Bureau [CB] of the Communist Party, which in turn was subordinated to the central All-Union *Zhenotdel*. The Azeri *Zhenotdel* had to fulfill two major missions in the framework of Muslim female emancipation.⁴⁶ First, it had to organize *Zhenotdel* branches at the district level that would open women's clubs running primary education and vocational training. The clubs also had to train Muslim female activists to work alongside other women: the lack of native Azeri functionaries and limited interactions of Muslim and non-Muslim women were two major challenges on the road to Bolshevik-style emancipation. Second, with the establishment of the women's journal

⁴⁴ *Kommunistka*, *The Communist Women*, 1920–1930, *Rabotnitsa*, *The Woman Worker*, 1914 until present, and *Krest'ianka*, *The Peasant Woman*, 1922 until present. These journals sought to make women aware of their rights and, since the 1920s, prompted them to participate in the construction of socialism.

⁴⁵ Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 65; R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860 – 1930*, 331-340; G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, 209, 260-264,

⁴⁶ E. Stasova, "Protokol 4-go soveshchaniia po rabote sredi zhenshchin musul'manok," (29 September 1920), RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 40, ll. 7–8.

Sharg Gadini, *Woman of the East*, in November 1923, *Zhenotdel* enhanced the spread of political propaganda and the promotion of a new socialist culture.⁴⁷

Zhenotdel's agenda was to integrate Muslim women into the economic, political, and social life of the socialist state and end female seclusion, veiling, legal inequality, and illiteracy. *Sharg Gadini* became the herald of Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* in its task of enlightenment with the mission to drag the Azeri women from oppression and expose conservative men who erected various obstacles to female emancipation.⁴⁸ In her speech on 7 September, 1920, delegate Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva warned members of the Congress of the People of the East, held in Baku, that all Muslim women would face various hardships while challenging the male interpretation of female emancipation.⁴⁹

To adapt policies formulated by Moscow to the local context, the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* recruited women of various nationalities and social backgrounds. Although Russian and Jewish functionaries Klavdiia Ishkova and Viktoria Tseitlin played leading roles in the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*, since the first days of its establishment in January 1922, Muslim Azeri women – Ayna Sultanova, Khadidzha Azizbekova, Dzheiran Bayramova, Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, Shakhria Zeynalova, Gulara Kadyrbekova, Natalia Tagiyeva, Mina Mirzoeva, Shargiia Gadzhieva, and others – held key positions at various *Zhenotdel* levels.⁵⁰ Those Azeri women in the majority had attended and taught in pre-revolutionary public schools, had worked outside their homes as teachers, and were married to men who were members of the Communist Party. These Azeri

⁴⁷ *Sharg Gadini, Woman of the East, 1923–1938*, the journal for Muslim women, published by Muslim women, illustrated the process of Azeri women's emancipation. The 1923 issue promised to eliminate "all women's enemies" through the exposition of outdated traditions like child marriage, polygamy, veiling, and seclusion.

⁴⁸ "Drogiye sestry nevol'nitsy," *Privetstvie pervogo Azerbaidzhanskogo bezpartiinogo zhenskogo s'ezda zhenshchinam vsego mira*, Baku, (March 1920), GARF f. 9550, op. 4, d. 11292, ll.1–2.

⁴⁹ Khavar Shabanova, *S'ezd narodov Vostoka: Baku, 1–8 sentiabria 1920. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Baku, 1920), 214–217.

⁵⁰ "Spravka o naznachanii V. Tseitlin," (January 20, 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 76, l. 34.

female activists, who struggled for Muslim women's liberation long before the Soviet gender emancipation movement, became an important asset for Moscow as they could break the barriers of traditional society more easily way than outsiders, due to their ethnic and religious background, family connections, and knowledge of local customs.⁵¹

By 1925, the number of Azeri female functionaries in Azerbaijan already comprised 63% of all female employees at the *Zhenotdel* in comparison with 59% in Tatarstan, 35% in Central Asia, 50% in Dagestan, and 34% in Crimea.⁵² *Zhenotdel* and *Sharg Gadini* activists came primarily from two backgrounds: the well-connected, reformation-influenced Azeri families, such as A. Sultanova, Kh. Azizbekova, G. Kadyrbekova, Kh. Shabanova, Dj. Bairamova; and others, such as N. Tagieva, M. Mirzoeva, and Sh. Gadzhieva – commoners who benefited from collaboration with the communists. These functionaries helped the central authorities transform the culture of Muslim women along the lines set by the Communist Party. The communist gender policies found positive responses among many Azeri women and men because the ideas of gender equality in education, voting, and companionate marriage resonated with the discourse of Muslim societal modernization from the turn of the twentieth century.⁵³

The Bolsheviks sought to emancipate all women, but women in Azerbaijan were not a homogeneous group: they lived in various cultural settings and required specific tactics to ease the transition from their secluded lifestyles to political and social participation. Therefore, the Bolsheviks introduced a network of *Zhenotdel* clubs designed specifically for Muslim women that

⁵¹ "Instruktsiia raz"ezdnykh instruktoram *Zhenotdela*," (January 28, 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 222, l. 10. This instruction demands the hiring of more Azeri women as *Zhenotdel* activists to work with the Muslim female population because of the perceived fear of russification among Azeri people. Azade-Ayshe Rorlich, "The *Ali Bayramov Club*, the Journal *Sharg Gadini*, and Socialisation of Azeri Women, 1920-30," in *Central Asian Survey*, no. 3-4 (1986): 221-239, 225.

⁵² Seifi, "O rabote na Vostoke i nashem kadre," *Kommunistka* 4 (March-April 1925): 75.

⁵³ M. Kamp, "Women-initiated Unveiling: State-led Campaigns in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan," in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (Location: Routledge, 2014), 212.

sought to involve Muslim women in the Soviet modernization program. In Azerbaijan, the first club for Muslim women began to function in its capital, Baku, in June 1920. The history of this club began with the initiative of Dzheiran Bairamova (1896–1987), an enthusiastic advocate for gender equality. Her biography is an excellent example of a transformation of a pre-Soviet Azeri female activist for Muslim women’s liberation from patriarchal traditions into a prominent Communist.⁵⁴



Figure 21. Dzheiran Bairamova at the XXX Congress of the Communist Party of AzSSR, Baku, 1981. AAKFD photo.

According to the official biography narrated by Dzheiran Bairamova in 1972, she was born into an impoverished family – her mother baked bread and her father sold it in the streets. She had one sibling: a sister, Mesme, who died in her early years. Thus, Dzheiran was the only child in the family. She recalled that when she was 15, her father engaged her to a man significantly older than her. However, Bairamova strongly opposed the marriage and ruined the proposed union, bitterly

⁵⁴ Please note that Dzheiran Bairamova, unlike Ayna Sultanova, Gulara Kadyrbekova, Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, and many others, did not perish during the time of the Stalinist purges. For this reason, her personal files are available at the state archive, ARDA. All documentation about those female communists who lost their lives by being pronounced “enemies of the people” during the time of the Great Purges, 1936–1938, are located at the State Archive for the Political Documents of the President’s Office of Azerbaijan Republic [Azerbaijan Respublikasi Prezidentin Ishler Idaresinin Siyasi Senedler Arkhivi]. These documents are considered “Top Secret” and are not available to researchers.

noting that her father had never forgiven her for this act.⁵⁵ Her official biography notes the remarkable fact that she was illiterate until age 15, and like other Muslim girls, learned to memorize fairy tales at home. She stressed that she had a strong desire to become an educated person and thus, instead of marriage, she chose school.⁵⁶ In this official biography, Bairamova claimed that she was introduced to public schooling at age 15 when one of her friends told her that there was a learning centre in one of the houses in their neighborhood, *mahala*, where girls could learn to read. Despite the fear of her parents' disapproval, she went there and was accepted by the head of one of the *Tagiev schools*, Rakhila Gadzhibekova.⁵⁷

Gulara Kadyrbekova in 1936 in her book *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi, The History of One Palace* also stressed the difficulties that poor Muslim girls faced in obtaining the education. Kadyrbekova stated that Bairamova went to the third of the *Tagiev schools* whose principal was Rakhila Gadzhibekova, because she was denied admission into the other two *Tagiev schools* on the basis of her humble origin, *cherekchi gizidir, the daughter of a bread seller*.⁵⁸ This episode highlights two Soviet official discourses: first, that education in the pre-revolution period was available only for the children from the rich families; second, that Azeri Soviet politicians and intellectuals tried to distance themselves from any project initiated by the Azeri cultural and industrial elite of the pre-Soviet period as dangerous factors for their careers and lives in the Stalinist epoch.

Bairamova recalled that she began to articulate her ideas about the need for education for Muslim girls in 1915.⁵⁹ In 1918 she married Ali Bairamov, a Communist, who encouraged her in this initiative. Bairamova joined the Communist Party in October 1919. During the period of the

⁵⁵ H. I. Sultanova, *Dzheiran Bairamova (biographic ocherk)* (Baku: Azerbaijan Devlet Neshriyat, Baku 1973), 3.

⁵⁶ This statement highlights that in Soviet Azerbaijan, it was forbidden to mention the traditional homeschooling provided by female religious or reformist teachers.

⁵⁷ Sultanova, *Dzheiran Bairamova*, 4.

⁵⁸ Gulara Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi* (Baku: Azerbaijan Devlet Neshriyat, 1936), 47.

⁵⁹ D. Bairamova, *Moi Vospominaniia* (Lichnyi fond D. Bairamovoi), (March 3, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d. 7, ll. 1–5

ADR she and her friend from the *Tagiev school*, Azeri Communist Zeinab Rizvanova, worked at the ADR's Parliament. The government office needed literate stenographers knowledgeable in the Azeri and Russian languages to keep records of the parliamentary sessions' minutes. Bairamova stated that she was assigned by the local Communists to spy on the Musavatist leaders and to inform the Bolsheviks about all political and military decisions of the ADR government.⁶⁰ On March 19, 1920, she was arrested by the Musavat government along with her husband, mother, and other relatives. On April 7, 1920, her husband was executed.⁶¹

In June 1920, to honor the memory of her late husband, in two rooms of her three-room house Bairamova organized a club to train Muslim women in basic literacy and sewing. As all women had children, she also opened a daycare called *Sunbul, The Spikelet*, for their kids in another room. Establishing this club, Bairamova aimed gradually to end illiteracy among Muslim women and help them to acquire some skills to become financially independent. The club received the name *Baki Merkezi Ischi Musul'man Gadinlar Klubu, The Central Club for Toiling Muslim Women of Baku*. At first, the club had ten members. Bairamova was the principal of the club, and Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, also a graduate of the *Tagiev school* and the wife of the prominent Communist and political leader Ali Gaydar Karaev, was a vice-principal.⁶² By 1922, the authorities recognized the club for its contribution to Muslim women's socialization and assigned the club a new building, the former palace of a pre-revolution oil tycoon, Murtuza Mukhtarov, where between 1916 and 1920 his wife Liza Mukhtarova hosted the *Baku Benevolent Muslim Women's Association*. The Bolsheviks named the club after the prominent revolutionary, Ali Bairamov, D. Bairamova's husband. The "Ali Bairamov" Club played a leading role in the process of Muslim

⁶⁰ Lichnyi fond D. Bairamovoi ARDA f. 1775, o. 1, d. 1, l. 85.

⁶¹ Lichnyi fond D. Bairamovoi ARDA f. 1775, o. 1, d. 1, l. 85.

⁶² D. Bairamova, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti kluba imeni Ali Bairamov," (August 10, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d 6, ll. 2-3.

women's emancipation.⁶³ In 1922, the second club, the "Ibrahim Abilov" Club, also named after another revolutionary, opened its doors. By 1932, there were already 42 women's clubs across the republic.⁶⁴



Figure 13. The picture of the former Murtuza Mukhtarov's palace where his wife, Liza Mukhtarova, hosted the Baku Woman's Benevolent Society. Former building of the Ali Bairamov Club. Modern Saadat Sarai, Palace of Happiness, ZAGS. Photo by author.

⁶³ R. A. Guseinova, "Istoricheskaia spravka Tsentral'nogo dvortsa kul'tury trudiashchikhsia-azerbaidzhanok imeni Ali Bairamova" (Baku, 1980) ARDTA f. 2683, o. 1, d.1, ll. 1–4.

⁶⁴ "Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR" (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 38, l. 40.

The clubs gained popularity among the Azeri population because women, regardless of their social status, perceived them as the cradles of culture, enlightenment, and justice, *Medeniat, Maarif va Hugug*. The clubs introduced all Muslim women to secular events that traditionally were not affordable to Muslim women from lower social strata, such as the theatre and musical performances, educational lectures and films. By 1935 the “Ali Bairamov” Club alone offered 599 educational meetings and provided 222 lectures, 307 excursions to museums and industrial laboratories, 503 theatre performances, 231 concerts, 357 film presentations, and 51 business trips to the villages to propagandize Soviet-type female emancipation programs.⁶⁵ The data for the “Ali Bairamov” Club alone indicates that by 1935, the club had trained 446,743 Azeri women in total at the educational and various vocational courses. From 1920–1923, there were 47,270 graduates; from 1924–1928, the club graduated 143,609 Muslim women; from 1929–1932, the club educated 100,786 students; and from 1933–1935, the number of graduates reached 155,078 women.⁶⁶



Figure 23. Azeri female students at the Ali Bairamov Club, Baku, 1923. AAKFD photo.

⁶⁵ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 81.

⁶⁶ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 30.



Figure 24. Azeri female students at the Ali Bairamov Club, Baku, 1928. AAKFD photo.

It is important to admit that the clubs, until the end of the 1920s, did not violate the ethnic and cultural identity of Muslim Azeris in the multinational community of Baku and other places. Also, the clubs offered literacy to women who historically had never had access to education, such as nomadic, village, and impoverished women, thus promising them social promotions within society through education. This tactic resonated with the old-imperial discourse about the enlightenment of all Muslim women for the benefit of the nation and equally attracted reform-minded activists and ordinary women. The clubs were also successful because they offered free childcare. The clubs' activists stressed the mutual benefits for a mother and child: a mother would become literate and acquire some skills to work in the public sector; a child would learn to think of the collective needs rather than of personal. Children also would acquire literacy, discipline, and nutritious meals that many parents in the 1920s could not have afforded due to the destruction of the economy and the infamous famine of 1924–1925 in Azerbaijan. Kadyrbekova stated that

the clubs were popular supporting her argument with the data: 125,439 infants and 127,181 toddlers attended the club's kindergarten between 1920 and 1935.⁶⁷ Also, all clubs had a consultation centre to provide legal aid for Muslim women to defend their rights. This tactic helped to attract Muslim women and spread Bolshevik ideas to the Azeri female masses. The government monitored the condition of the clubs with great seriousness, exposing every problem. Documents also revealed that unlike the "Ali Bairamov" Club, the clubs in the regions suffered from a lack of adequate funding, unprepared workers, and corruption of personnel that led to a low rate of women and children enrolled at the clubs and kindergartens, respectively.⁶⁸

Kadyrbekova called the club *Medani Inqlab Odzhagi, Hearth of the Cultural Revolution*, and *Insan Fabrikasi, The Human Factory* that shaped the new woman. Famous Communists and revolutionaries, such as Klara Zetkin, Sergei Kirov, and Maria Ul'ianova, Lenin's sister, were among the honorable guests to see the club's achievements in Muslim women's emancipation.⁶⁹ The club successfully delivered its program to liberate Muslim women by empowering them through the introduction of common literacy and full employment to the All-Soviet public.⁷⁰ The "Ali Bairamov" Club appealed to Azeri people from the Party tribune, public meetings, and private houses. However, clearly understanding that the target audience was isolated by Islamic gender norms, the club's activists went to the strictly female spaces in the Azeri community, such as the communal bathhouses.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 81. (Please note that these numbers are not supported by other sources. Also, this data does not indicate for how long children stayed in kindergarten after their enrolments).

⁶⁸ "Protokoly zasedanii plenumov i kollegii Zhenotdela TsKKPB AzSSR" (Protokol 2, January–February 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 221, ll. 1–14.

⁶⁹ *Sharg Gadini*, no. 5 (1925): 15; D. Bairamova, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti kluba imeni Ali Bairamov," (August 10, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d 6, l. 2.

⁷⁰ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 46.

⁷¹ "Instruktsiia raz'ezdnyim instruktoram Zhenotdela," (January 28, 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 222, l. 10.

In the traditional Muslim environment, the bathhouse was more than a spa. Rather, it was a salon or a club where women could socialize, discuss, and arrange their life-circle events. These places had saunas, massage rooms, cafés, and music and poetry circles along with corners where the matchmakers worked.⁷² The *Zhenotdel* activists dynamically used this traditional place for female socialization to convey the Bolshevik message of women's emancipation by reading decrees, issues of the journal *Sharg Gadini*, and proclamations about the benefits of enrollment into the clubs. The official instructions released by the central *Zhenotdel* in Baku demanded that its activists neither encourage Muslim women to throw off their veils nor to enter the Communist Party. Rather, they were required to propagandize the benefits of education Muslim women would receive at the women's clubs.⁷³

However, this approach produced the first tensions over the pace of gender reforms between the Moscow-based and Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*. Moscow officials demanded the full and prompt end of gender segregation in accordance with official Party regulations, while the native female activists emphasized the local realities that would have first required them to organize Muslim women, separately from men, at the less-politicized women's clubs. The local activists, regardless of their nationality, recognized this tactic as the only effective way to attract Muslims to Bolshevik-style female emancipation.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Moscow officials criticized this approach as a deviation from the official Party policies that they believed could result in the superiority of feminist interests over class concerns.

⁷² About the Azerbaijani traditions and role of the bathhouses, see: H. A. Khavilov. *Azerbaycan etnografiyası* (Baki: Elm, 1991), 80-89; Q. Qeybullayev, *Azerbaycanlılarda aile va nikah: Tarikh etnografik tedqiqat. XIX esr va XX esrin avvalari* (Baki: Elm, 1966), 68-94; A. K. Alekperov, *Issledovania po arkheologii i etnografii Azerbajjana* (Baku: AzGiz, 1960), 13-18.

⁷³“Instruksiia raz'ezdnyim instruktoram Zhenotdela,” (January 28, 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 222, ll. 10–12.

⁷⁴K. Ishkova, “Otchet o rabote Zhenotdela TsK AzKPb,” (January–February 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 345, ll. 18–19; “Kak rabotaiut v Baku,” *Kommunistka* 3–4 (August–September 1920): 33–34.

The Moscow-based functionaries underlined the danger in organizing women outside of party structures, thereby fostering bourgeois feminism. Party officials stressed the need for systematic guidance based upon class perspectives. The centre accused Azeri activists of “Muslim Feminism,” of turning men into women’s enemies, and of aloofness to class struggle.⁷⁵ This denunciation directly echoed the Twelfth Congress of the RCP(b)’s official discourse that emphasized the threat of prioritization of gender reforms above issues of class solidarity in Russia as well.⁷⁶ The Azeri-native reform functionaries pointed out that only non-Muslim women in Azerbaijan could publicly interact with men; therefore, only their indoctrination could be conducted in accordance with Party principles. The Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* leaders had to defend their method for achieving Muslim gender-segregated agency and argued that this was the only method able to make an initial change among Muslim women.

Moreover, the centre accused the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* of ethnic segregation by banning non-Muslim women from the clubs. It is true that to avoid accusations of a feminist agenda the Azeri female activists prevented non-Muslim women from attending the clubs. The only roles allocated to women of non-Islamic background were as clerks or instructors running the clubs.⁷⁷ The Azeri *Zhenotdel* workers claimed that the Muslim population viewed the Soviet policy of blending Muslim and non-Muslim women in the clubs as a threat to their cultural identity. They stated that such an approach would provoke hostility and turn Muslim women away from those clubs. The *Zhenotdel* officers acknowledged that Muslim women did not interact with different

⁷⁵ V. Tseitlin, “God raboty sredi zhenshchin Azerbaidzhana,” *Kommunistka* 6–7, January 1922, 31–32. Druzhinina, “Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny Vostoka,” *Kommunistka* 1 (January 1922): 19–21. V. K., “Formy i metody massovoi raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei,” *Kommunistka* 9 (September 1923): 67–75.

⁷⁶ *Dvenadtsatyi S’ezd RKP(b), April 17–25, 1923, Stenograficheskii otchet*, Moscow, 1968, 724.

⁷⁷ Putilovskaia, “Rabota Kommunisticheskikh partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka,” *Kommunistka* 12–13 (May–June 1921): 52–54; K. Ishkova, “Itogi soveshchaniia zaveduiushchikh i instruktorov otdelov rabotnits Azerbaidzhana,” *Kommunistka* 10 (October 1923): 45–47; A. Nukhrat, “Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov zhenskikh klubov,” *Kommunistka* 9 (September 1926): 12–14.

ethnic and religious groups, non-Turkic and non-Muslim, however, they proposed that over time the clubs would someday gradually bring the culturally diverse women of Azerbaijan together.⁷⁸

For the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* activists, the clubs for Muslim women were not the only means to expand the boundaries of Muslim women's everyday life. They also organized, under Moscow's supervision, craftsmen cooperative workshops, *artel*'s, and cooperative stores that sold goods produced only by female artisans exclusively to women at prices lower than at the regular stores owned by male traders. In 1921, there were 21 women's *artel*'s across the republic: 11 in Baku and 10 in other regions with nearly 4,000 Muslim female members in total.⁷⁹ These were women-only businesses, and an ideal space for propaganda purposes, not only for Bolshevik ideology and women's rights, but also for everyday issues: child-raising, health care, and education.⁸⁰ Unlike clubs, which also maintained gender segregation, these stores and clubs' *artel*'s received undisputable approval and support from the centre as the path to women's liberation through employment outside the home and the conversion of private, unpaid work performed within the household to paid work in the socialist sector of the economy. Therefore, in accordance with Marxist theory, both of these conditions would provide the basis for complete gender equality.⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Itogovyi otchet za noiabr' 1920- noiabr' 1922 po rabote sredi zhenshchin Azerbaidzhana," (No date) RGASPI f.64, op. 1, d. 222, l. 11; Putilovskaia, "Rabota Kommunisticheskikh partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka," *Kommunistka* 12–13 (May–June 1921): 52–54; K. Ishkova, "Itogi soveshchania zaveduiushchikh i instruktorov otdelov rabotnits Azerbaidzhana," *Kommunistka* 10 (October 1923): 45–47; A. Nukhrat, "Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov zhenskikh klubov," *Kommunistka* 9 (September 1926): 12–14.

⁷⁹ Fannina W. Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, trans. Margaret M. Green (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938), 144–145; "Protokol zasedaniia komissii po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostoka," (30 April 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 94, l. 35.

⁸⁰ Artiukhina, "Ob ocherednykh zadachakh KUTB," (No date) GARF f. 3316, op. 50. d. 18. ll. 34–36; V. Kasparov, "Zadachi partii v oblasti raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei," *Kommunistka* 7 (June–July 1925): 86–92.

⁸¹ Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 42; Tseitlin "Protokol zasedania komissii po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostoka," Tseitlin also stated that complete female emancipation would be achieved through women's economic independence. (30 April 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 94, ll. 11–13.

In her book, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, Kadyrbekova emphasized the low employment rate among Azeri women before Sovietization, the factor that deprived Muslim women of financial and social independence. She supported her argument by providing the example of the Tagiev's textile factory that had only 250 Muslim female employees whose salary was half as much than that of male workers. Kadyrbekova highlighted the achievements of the *Turk emekchi gadin*, *Turk toiling woman*, under Soviet rule. In her opinion, the advance of Soviet power gave Azeri women true liberation by granting them access to education, full employment, and equality in rights.⁸²

Kadyrbekova described the different paths that brought Azeri women to the Muslim women's clubs. Particularly, she illustrated the case of the "Ali Bairamov" Club, admitting that all women were united in their desire to end gender segregation, and to become literate and independent. She presented the most prominent leaders along with the commoners who helped to achieve the task of Muslim women's emancipation through primary education and vocational training – midwifery, nursing, telephone operation, sewing, and weaving. She recalled D. Bairamova's determination to change the lives of Muslim women from a position of ignorance to entitlement by applying her profound education, skills, and family support.⁸³

Kadyrbekova also introduced another prominent activist, Mina khanum Mirzoeva, who was in her fifties when she became a club member and then one of its leaders. Kadyrbekova illustrated Mina khanum's struggles to feed her children, left without her husband's support, by working as a laundress during the turbulent days of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Without mentioning the freedoms to vote granted by the Provisional Government and her experience exercising this right during the period of the ADR, Mina khanum stated that for the first time she voted to elect members for food distribution committees in early 1918. However, she

⁸² Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 11.

⁸³ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 48.

bitterly noted that because of strong opposition from the Islamic radical clergy and their male supporters, she, like other Muslim women, could not obtain any seats on those committees and, thus, make any changes. Mina khanum was never satisfied with the traditional female role as a domestic servant and glorified the Bolshevik revolution that emancipated Muslim women.⁸⁴

Another club activist, Zeinab Rizaieva, described her life before joining the club as a series of misfortunes. She recalled that her father, of a low social status, had married her forcefully at age 12. Experiencing many hardships in that union, she ran from her husband. However, she was forced into another marriage at the age of 15 to a well-off jewelry store employee. The second husband treated her better but kept her within the house walls. So, she did not know about the two revolutions and about the existence of the ADR. One day, on her way to the public bathhouse, she met a female friend who told her about the club for Muslim women and its enlightening role in women's lives.⁸⁵ Rizaieva joined the "Ali Bairamov" Club despite her husband's disapproval, although later he became satisfied that she had learned some literacy and sewing skills which helped her to find a job at the club and bring home an additional income.⁸⁶ By narrating these life-stories, Kadyrbekova highlights how Azeri women found their freedom when they began to attend the clubs, which were the conductors of the Communist Party's politics of societal transformation through female mass education across all Soviet Union.⁸⁷

The history of female mass education in Soviet Azerbaijan began with the Bolsheviks' proclamation of universal education as a top priority just two weeks after accession to power on April 28, 1920. On May 12, 1920, the newly established Commissariat of Enlightenment declared the introduction of nine years of free obligatory schooling in the native Azeri language. The

⁸⁴ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 50–51.

⁸⁵ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 53.

⁸⁶ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 54.

⁸⁷ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 95.

Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee, *Azrevkom*, was responsible for the implementation of this program.⁸⁸ The Commissariat of Enlightenment first appropriated existing teaching resources and training institutions, turning them into Soviet educational centres.⁸⁹ The new regime also eliminated the teaching of religion at school and abolished the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs, thus proclaiming Bolshevik Azerbaijan a secular republic.⁹⁰

Two years earlier, in 1918, the Bolsheviks introduced similar reforms to education in Turkestan. However, the reforms, which included seizing religious property and shutting down religious educational centres, such as *maktabs* and *madrasah*, provoked war with the emerging militant opposition, *Basmachi*. In 1921, because of this severe resistance, the Turkestan Communist Party had to stop interfering into religious affairs and in 1923 the government returned all properties traditionally belonging to religious educational institutions. As a result, in Turkestan in 1923 alone, there were 5,600 *maktabs* with 70,000 male students that functioned along with the Soviet-type schools.⁹¹

In Azerbaijan, this reformation of education did not meet widespread opposition from the population because the pre-revolution discourse about reformed education, practically supported by the network of modern schools for boys and girls, desacralized knowledge and separated religious leaders, *ulama*, from education. There is no evidence about the number of *maktabs* and *madrasah* for Muslim male and female students that functioned in Azerbaijan in the 1920s. However, there were many government and Party reports from the 1920s that Islamic religious leaders organized the reformed schools to compete with the state educational system. As the

⁸⁸ “Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo Narkomprosa AzSSR uездnym revkomam ob organizatsii pri nikh otdelov po prosveshcheniiu,” (May 15, 1920) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 9, l. 15.

⁸⁹ “Kopii i proekty dekretov Azrevkoma. Narodnyii Komissariat Prosveshcheniia,” (May 26–December 1, 1920) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 144, l. 29.

⁹⁰ “Dekret Narkomprosa AzSSR ob uprazhnenii musavatskogo Ministerstva Veroispovedaniia i otmene prepodovaniia religioznykh uchenii v shkole,” (May 1920) ARDA f. 410, o. 1, d. 3, l. 11.

⁹¹ Kamp, *The New Women in Uzbekistan*, 85.

reports came from the opponents of this reformist movement, the Soviet agency, the numbers of students in this alternative to the Soviet schools is difficult to summarize too. Along with this, there is compelling evidence that the struggle for women's souls between the Soviet and religious reformed teachings in Azerbaijan was intense, and its apogee was in 1927–29, during the Soviet anti-religious campaign.

The Islamic clerics of the Soviet Union argued that the Bolshevik gender reformation was radical and aimed to separate a new female generation from traditional culture. Realizing that women were the only societal strata that would be able to retain traditions, they began a campaign to turn Muslim women away from the Soviet gender movement by introducing them to reformed Islamic doctrines.⁹² These moderate religious reformers continued their late-Imperial discourse, arguing that the Koran did not require face covering or polygyny and called for modern female education. Moreover, they undermined the canonical interpretation of mosques as male-centric institutions by allowing women to pray there and even become ministers.⁹³ In the late 1920s, in Azerbaijan, the Bahá'í “The Women's Progress Society” was a particular threat to the Soviet program for women's emancipation. In 1927, there were several literacy societies in Baku alone. In the rural regions, along with literacy courses, Bahá'ís also organized centres for poverty relief for impoverished peasants during the period of famine in 1924–1925, giving women an opportunity to attend literacy classes.⁹⁴

⁹² Ismail Suleiman, “Gadinlarin esas roludur,” *Asri Musul'manlig* (15 June 1925): 5; Bilal Faik, “Cirkin khususi khaginda,” *Asri Musul'manlig* (May 1925): 4; Adzhi Mudzhaheddin, “Islam ve akhlagzizlik,” *Asri Musul'manlig* (May 1925): 4; Protokoly, “Materialy iz svodki otdela OGPU #12 ‘Dukhovenstvo (sovershenno sekretno) Top Secret’,” RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 23.

⁹³ Nukhrat, “Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi ‘O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'manok (sovershenno sekretno),” (Top Secret, 2 March 1925) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 24.

⁹⁴ “Sostoianie massovoi agitatsionnoi i kul'traboty v promyshlennikh raionakh Azerbaidzhana za 1927 god,” (Top Secret, 5 March 1928) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 410. l. 296.

The Soviet policy pursuing purely secular emancipation undermined the position of those clerics who were involved in women's emancipation, particularly the Bahá'ís.⁹⁵ Along with this, Moscow officials considered the debate on methods of women's emancipation as an extension of the pre-revolution all-Russia *Jadids* discourse on women's societal roles within the religious reformation.⁹⁶ Party agents chose not to cooperate with the reform-minded clergy because the socialist government aimed to transform society by replacing any traditional authority and knowledge with its own.

In Azerbaijan, the Leninist *Great Cultural Revolution* demanded the elimination of illiteracy among Muslim women to make Azerbaijan a “civilized country.”⁹⁷ This goal echoed the call from the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy, *Likbez*, newly-created on June 19, 1920, which declared that literacy was a cornerstone of the Communist Party's program for societal transformation.⁹⁸ From their tribunes in Moscow and in Baku, the Party leaders described all Muslim women as “universally illiterate” and thus diverged from the pre-revolutionary history of education of young Muslim women and girls in Azerbaijan.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Molotov, “Proekt rezoliutsii po dokladu ob itogakh II s'ezda soiuzna bezbozhnikov i o rabote antireligioznoi komissii TsK,” (4 August 1929) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 7, ll. 12–13; “Perepiska s TsK AzSSSR o vysylke, kolichestve molitvennykh zdaniy i o proverke faktov izlozhennykh v zhalobe religioznogo obshchestva bekhaistov v gorodakh Kirovobad i Barda na nezakonnyi arrest ikh chlenov,” (29 December 1936–4 February 1938) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 1–6.

⁹⁶ Nukhrat, ““Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi ‘O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'manok (sovershenno sekretno),” (Top Secret, 9 October 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 5; Protokoly “Materialy iz svodki otdela OGPU #12 ‘Dukhovenstvo (sovershenno sekretno),’” (Top Secret, No date) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, ll. 26–28, 32, 62; Mekhtiev and Isakov, “V komissiiu po voprosam kul'ta pri prizidiiu TsK SSSR,” (Top secret, 27 December 1936) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 1–4.

⁹⁷ M. Guliyev, “VI Umumi Azerbaijan Sovetler gurultaiyinda respublikada medani guruilig meselelary haggynda AzSSSR Khalg Maarif komissary joldash M. Guliyev me'rusesi,” *Vestnik arkhivov AzSSSR*, 1975 1–2. D. 98. 1711–74.

⁹⁸ *Izvestia* 162 (July 24, 1920). The Commission had to coordinate the Bolshevik program to eradicate illiteracy among all people aged 8 to 50 years old regardless of their native language. The Bolsheviks inherited from Tsarist Russia a population that was nearly 80% illiterate. Vladimir Lenin considered this problem, along with the position of the non-Russian peoples, the top priority to address in the decrees beginning in 1919.

⁹⁹ V. Tseitlin, “Pervoe kraevoe soveshchanie zaveduiushchikh *Zhenotdelom* Kavkazskikh respublik,” (October 2, 1921) RGASPI f. 64, o.1, d. 217, ll. 42–63; “Protokoly zasedaniia plenumov i kollegii *Zhenotdela* TsK KKP AzSSSR,” (Protokol 8, January–February 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 221, ll. 1–14.

Moreover, the Communists, seeing themselves as bearers of the light of modernity, criticized the education provided by reformed schools and teachers for their alleged harmful influence.

Ishkova and Tseitlin, the leaders of Azeri *Zhenotdel*, were the most prolific authors of Russian-language publications about Azeri women. Along with official reports for the Party's Central Committee, they wrote articles for the *Zhenotdel* journal, *Kommunistka*. They conveyed to Russian readers that before the revolution the majority of Azeri women, *Tiurchanki*, were deprived of education and were surrounded by walls of religious fanaticism, superstition, and dark traditions. In their reports and publications, both authors focused on the politics of education, available only to girls from noble and rich families, in reformed schools rather than Soviet schools. They argued that the old schools gave education only to the children of wealthy people, rejecting the facts that the majority of the female students of the *Tagiev schools* were boarding pupils of humble origins. Also, they contrasted the missions of the two educational systems: the old one prepared students from elite families to lead a petit-bourgeois life-style, while the Soviet system offered education to all people regardless of their class background and trained them to build a society of equals. Moreover, by providing religious education, the old schools enforced the patriarchal traditions, which were responsible for Muslim women's ignorant status, while the Soviet schools, by rejecting religion, liberated Muslim women.¹⁰⁰

The leading Azeri activists followed such discourse. Kadyrbekova juxtaposed the Soviet and Musavat approaches to female education. She denounced the Musavat leaders of the ADR as elitist and non-progressive, stating that they indoctrinated women in religion, thus enforcing

¹⁰⁰ K. Ishkova, "Itogi soveshchania zaveduiushchikh i instruktorov otdelov rabotnits Azerbaidzhana," *Kommunistka* 10 (October 1923): 45–47; V. Tseitlin, "God raboty sredi zhenshchin Azerbaidzhana," *Kommunistka* 6-7 (January 1922): 31–32; K. Ishkova, "Ali Bairamov namina musul'man ischi gadinlar klubu," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1 (November 1923): 25.

patriarchal traditions.¹⁰¹ Kadyrbekova also criticized the old school system that left the majority of young females unenlightened. Statistical data from the ARDA supports this statement, emphasizing the importance of the state rather than the initiatives of several rich individuals in the attempt to spread common literacy among the population.

Table 1. Statistical table on the number of Azeri girls and boys enrolled in elementary public schools between 1914 and 1929.¹⁰²

Years	1914/15	1919/20	1920/21	1921/22	1922/23	1923/24	1924/25	1925/26	1926/27	1927/28	1928/29
Azeri boys	20,299	15,201	32,240	36,830	35,830	46,322	60,134	68,424	69,051	75,917	78,844
Azeri girls	1,862	1,420	6,448	7,489	7,489	8,032	11,432	13,619	13,943	15,985	20,701
Total	22,162	22,162	38,688	44,319	44,319	54,354	71,566	82,043	82,994	91,902	99,545

Kadyrbekova also depicted young Azeri women and girls of the pre-Soviet period as backward, ignorant, and left without any hope for enlightenment by the corrupt clergy and bourgeoisie. Those who received any education were the daughters of local wealthy people, but still their training gave them little freedom and left them dependent on men. Kadyrbekova traced Azeri women’s struggle for modern education to an awakening that began solely with the advance of new life brought by Bolshevik brothers and sisters. She emphasized that by entering the “Ali

¹⁰¹ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 10.

¹⁰² M. Guliyev, “Ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska k 5-tu letnemu planu vovlechenia devochek v nachal’nye shkoly,” (September 6, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 762, l. 19.

Bairamov” Club and other Soviet organizations for Muslim women’s emancipation, Azeri women and girls liberated themselves from their old life. By presenting herself as entirely unacquainted with learning, she, like the authors of the *Sharg Gadini*, totally denied that many of her cohort were well-educated long before sovietization.¹⁰³



Figure 25. Gulara Kadyrbekova, Baku, 1930. AAKFD photo.

Gulara Kadyrbekova (1903–1942) was born to the family of a progressive *akhund*, in Sheki. She received education at home and at one of the local schools run by modern teachers that provided instruction in the Russian language. In 1920 she graduated from a pedagogical college in Sheki and worked as a schoolteacher until the mid-1920s. Her good education and knowledge of the Russian language equipped her well to work as one of the leaders of the Azeri *Zhenotdel* from the mid-1920s. Between 1930 and 1937 Kadyrbekova supervised the “Ali Bayramov” Club. Between 1931 and 1937 she was the editor in chief of the journal *Sharg Gadini*. Until her arrest, on July 23, 1938, Kadyrbekova supervised several political organizations. She was arrested as a

¹⁰³ “Yeni Turk alifbasinin medchburi tedbiki xakkinda,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7–8 (1928): 1–2; “Aiile xeiatendaki ixtilafariniesas sebebleri,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 12; S. Muaiib, “Azerbajjanda gadin maarifi,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8 (1926): 11; “Kirmizi Azerbajjanda Turk gadin maarifi,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2 (1924): 36–48.

perceived Musavatist who planned a coup against the Soviet powers along with her husband Asaf Rakhmanov, a Communist and the executive official at the Azeri branch of the NKVD. Rakhmanov was arrested and executed earlier in January 1938. In 1939, Kadyrbekova was sentenced to 10 years and sent to the one of the GULAG camps in Siberia where she died in 1942.¹⁰⁴



Figure 26. Ayna Sultanova, Baku, 1937. AAKFD photo.

The pre-Soviet educational experience of another prominent Azeri female communist, Ayna Sultanova (nee Musabekova, 1895–1938), supports my argument that old-Imperial schooling advanced by the Azeri reformers helped her to become a high-ranking officials in the Soviet state. Ayna was born and raised in Pirabedil’ village of Kuba district. She came from a well-off family. Her father, Makhmud Musabekov, sent his two daughters, Ayna and Iakhshi, to study at the school for Muslim girls in Baku. Between 1906 and 1912 both girls gained education at the *Tagiev school* in Baku. In 1912, at age 17, Ayna began to work as a teacher at one of the public schools for Muslim girls. Sultanova worked there for six years along with her former teachers,

¹⁰⁴ In Zia Buniatov, *Kirmizi terror* (Baku, 1993); Sabir Kengerli, *Kher satirde bir tarikh* (Baku: Yazichi, 1994).

such as Shafiga Efendiieva and Sakina Akhundova, the famous female Azeri writers and journalists.¹⁰⁵ Being disappointed with the societal and gender inequality in the Azeri community, she and her brother Gazanfar joined the Communist Party in 1918. After that period, Sultanova, by implementing her knowledge and skills, worked to end gender isolation, veiling, and illiteracy with the support of the Bolshevik state.¹⁰⁶ She was the first editor in chief of the journal *Sharg Gadini*. Until her arrest and execution, she was a high-ranking politician. From 1930–1932, she held the post of the Commissar of Public Enlightenment.

Between 1934–1938, Sultanova was appointed as a Chair of the Supreme Court and a Commissar of Justice of the AzSSR. Her brother, Gazanfar Musabekov (1888–1938) was a doctor and a politician of Soviet Azerbaijan before his arrest and execution in 1938, as an “enemy of the people.” Musabekov graduated from the Medical Academy named after Saint Vladimir in Kiev (now the capital of Ukraine). Along with his university peers and close friends, such as Dzhaliil Mamedkulizade (future writer and editor of the satirical journal *Molla Nasreddin*), writer Yusif Vezirov (his diary and novels are an important part of this research), and other intellectuals aimed to reform Azeri society through the introduction of common modern literacy. Musabekov was a leading Azeri Communist who realized the sovietization of Azerbaijan. He was a Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of AzSSR (1922–1930), Head of the Transcaucasian SFSR (1925–1938), Commissar of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry (1922 - 1929).

Ayna Sultanova’s husband, Gamid Sultanov (1889–1938), a graduate of the Polytechnic University of Leipzig, Germany, was a leading figure in Communist Party of Azerbaijan. In 1918 they both fled to Bolshevik Russia, Astrakhan, to escape arrest by the Musavat government for

¹⁰⁵ A. Sultanova, *Ayna Sultanova*, 6–12.

¹⁰⁶ “Zhertvy repressii 30-kh godov,” *Obshchestvenno-politicheskii literaturno-khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* (Baku: Organ TsKLKSM AzSSR, 1988), 19–24.

their Bolshevik activity in Azerbaijan. After the sovietization of Azerbaijan, Gamid Sultanov was a Commissar of Internal Affairs, NKVD, between 1920 and 1921. From 1925, he was the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars. The Sultanovs had three children: Gamid (1920), Nazanin (1927), and Vladlen (short for VLADimir LENin, 1929). There is no information about their children after 1938.¹⁰⁷

The leader of the Azeri *Zhenotdel*, Ishkova, from the Party tribune in Moscow, praised Ayna Sultanova's achievements in Muslim women emancipation. Particularly, she emphasized that Sultanova propagandized the benefits of education for Muslim women and the nation as a whole.¹⁰⁸ Sultanova, like her counterparts – Kadyrbekova, Bairamova, and other female Azeri communists in turn credited the Soviet state for granting Muslim women the right to education, abolishing all Islamic norms and patriarchal institutions, and, finally, allowing the Azeri people to have their state – the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic. This rhetoric was part of the official discourse that stressed the enlightened and liberated mission of the Bolsheviks in the backward Muslim East. Its advocates argued that pre-Soviet education did not make any contribution to modern education, that it served only the wealthy, and that it was responsible for absolute illiteracy. Nevertheless, the Commissariat of Enlightenment, despite the Bolshevik rhetoric about class enemies and absolute separation from “old world” culture, quickly realized that it was far easier to train already literate Muslim women who had studied in the pre-revolution educational centres as *Zhenotdel* activists and teachers than to train illiterate females.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “Zhertvy repressii 30-kh godov,” *Obshchestvenno-politicheskii literaturno-khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* (Baku: Organ TsKLKSM AzSSR, 1988), 19–24.

¹⁰⁸ V. Tseitlin, “O nashei rabote,” (1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 217, l. 118.

¹⁰⁹ “Dekret o likvidatsii negramotnosti sredi naselenia AzSSR,” (June 1920) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 279, l. 11. This decree proposed eliminating illiteracy among the Azeri population by April 28, 1930, to mark the 10th anniversary of Soviet Azerbaijan.

The Soviet system needed teachers and thus recognized those teachers with pre-revolution experience without question until the end of the 1920s.¹¹⁰ Along with this, the Bolsheviks invited female teachers from Turkey, emphasizing the benefits of their training at European teaching colleges.¹¹¹ The Bolsheviks did not have time and recourse to fully train the students in modern subjects, teaching methods, and Communist ideology, and then to supply them to the Soviet women's clubs and schools. However, the strong need for female Muslim teachers, the conductors of the Bolshevik ideology, produced the strategy to train as many women teachers as quickly as possible.¹¹² To implement this strategy the Commissariat of Enlightenment, with the help of the *Zhenotdel*, established brief, three- or six-month training courses to turn already literate women into teachers for those literacy courses that offered the most basic form of education. Along with this, on October 9, 1921, the government issued a decree that announced the establishment of four-year pedagogical colleges across the republic to train female teachers in the Azeri language.¹¹³

The need for female teachers in girls' primary schools and women's literacy courses at women's clubs was so great that students also performed teaching responsibilities while they were still in school themselves. The courses took place at the clubs for Muslim women's emancipation. The age of the female students varied from teenage girls to middle-aged women. The "Ali Bairamov" Club was the central organ that carried out the program to produce female Muslim teachers. In total, the club trained 4396 teachers. Between 1920 and 1923, 158 teachers graduated from the club; from 1924–1928, 1021 teachers; from 1929–1932, the number was 1546; and from 1933–1935, the number rose to 1671.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ "Otchetnyi doklad za 1922-1923 god," (Dec 15, 1923) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 256, ll. 136–138.

¹¹¹ "Plany otdela po rabote sredi zhenshchin KavBuro TsKRKPB," (July–September 1920) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 218, l. 2.

¹¹² "Postanovlenie ACPC 390 o rabote sredi zhenshin," (December 12, 1922) ARDA f. 1114, o. 1, d. 1020, l. 29.

¹¹³ "Doklad Narkomu Prosveshcheniia ot zaveduiushchei zhenskoi seminariei M. Kalibekovoi," (March 17, 1923) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 256, l. 46–47.

¹¹⁴ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 17.

In 1926 alone, the statistical data about the number of the female instructors in the republic indicates that the number of the female Azeri teachers was small in comparison to the number of male Azeri and female Russian and Armenian teaching staff.

Table 2. Statistical table on the number of Azeri female teachers in 1926 in Azerbaijan.¹¹⁵

Azeri male teachers % 63.3	Azeri female teachers % 15.2
Russian male teachers % 11.0	Russian female teachers % 43.4
Armenian male teachers % 13.8	Armenian female teachers % 24.0

Through the eradication of illiteracy, the clubs for Muslim women aimed to socialize and politically mobilize the female Azeri population. The data about the number of the graduates from the “Ali Bairamov” Club alone indicates that between 1920 and 1923, these classes were attended by 1105 women. From 1924–1928, the number of graduates was 2586. From 1929–1932, 1985 students finished those courses. In the years between 1933 and 1935, the number of graduates was 2379.¹¹⁶ This statistical data also demonstrates that Muslim women of Baku preferred to end their illiteracy studying at the gender segregated women’s clubs than at the public courses, *Likbez*, where they had to be mixed with male students.

¹¹⁵ “Raspredelenie pedagogicheskogo personal po narodnosti i polu,” (1926) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 430, ll. 1–4.

¹¹⁶ Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi*, 16.

Table 3. Statistical table on Azeri women’s enrollment in courses for illiteracy elimination, *Likbez*, Baku 1921–1927.¹¹⁷

Years	Azeri men	Azeri women
1921–1922	2010	53
1922–1923	4129	15
1924–1925	5558	437
1925–1926	715	301
1926–1927	542	No data

Given this fact about traditional Islamic culture, the gender-segregated clubs were more successful than the gender-mixed *Likbez* in the mission to educate and socialize Azeri women.¹¹⁸

Since the first years of the Bolshevik program on gender reformation, the *Zhenotdel*’s agents began a campaign to end female illiteracy in the countryside. The movement sprang from the pages of Azeri print media that depicted the villagers as ignorant religious fanatics who stood as the guardians of Islamic dogmas about women’s humble position. To implement the project of ending illiteracy among rural women, the Party decided to send the recent graduates of pedagogical courses to work at the educational centres established for this purpose at the communal centres, such as *Kirmizi Kosha*, *Red Corners*, for the rural sedentary population and *Bilim Yurt*, *Tent of Knowledge*, for the nomadic women.¹¹⁹ To spread literacy to women in rural areas, the

¹¹⁷ “Svedeniia o rabote likbeza goroda Baku,” (December 21, 1927) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 293, ll. 198–208.

¹¹⁸ Information that *Likbez* was gender-mixed can be found here: “Postanovlenie ACPC 390 o rabote sredi zhenshin,” (December 12, 1922) ARDA f. 1114, o. 1, d. 1020, l. 4-11; “Svedeniia o rabote likbeza goroda Baku,” (December 21, 1927) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 293, ll. 13-18.

¹¹⁹ “Plany otdela po rabote sredi zhenshchin KavBuro TsKRKPB,” (July–September 1920) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 218, l. 2, ll.6–8; “Rezoliutsia po dokladu o massovoi rabote sredi kochevogo naselenia,” (March 13, 1929–April 0, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 773, ll. 44–45; Vypiska o rabote sredi kochevnikov, (April 30, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 773, l. 73.

Commissariat of Enlightenment established a City-Countryside Solidarity Society that worked by recruiting literate and skilled village women who had recently moved into cities to spend some time (usually during the summer months) in their home villages to propagandize Soviet gender reforms and achievements. Also, secondary schoolgirls went to the homes of illiterate women and taught them individually. This tactic was particularly widespread since the mid-1920s when a new cohort of urban girls received Soviet-style education.¹²⁰

The Party also established training centres in the cities to train village women to become teachers in their communities after graduation. However, the Progress Reports from the pedagogical colleges illustrate that this Party appeal to train female teachers from the region and then place them to work in their rural communities was not realized in the 1920s for several reasons.¹²¹ First, village dwellers did not send their daughters to study and live in cities alone unless they had relatives who could guard their female offspring there. Another problem was that those young rural women who went to study in cities refused to return to “dark” villages after experiencing the benefits of urban life. Also, those female teachers of urban origin who came to the rural regions to work faced many hardships that slowed the process of ending illiteracy there. Their families considered sending their daughters and wives to work alone in remote areas as an immoral act that would bring shame on their family reputation. The villagers, in turn, considered such women to be dishonored and thus, treated them as sexually frivolous. Hence, despite all the efforts of many zealous female activists who went to the regions to convince women and girls to enter the village schools, the process of enlightening rural girls and women went very slowly.¹²²

¹²⁰ “Rezoliutsii rabotnikov zhenklubov i ugovkov krest’ianok,” (September 5–7, 1926) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 773, ll. 50–52.

¹²¹ “Doklad Narkomu Prosveshcheniia ot zaveduiushchei zhenskoi seminariei M. Kalibekovoi,” (March 17, 1923) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 256, ll. 44–47.

¹²² “Protokoly zasedanii plenumov i kollegii Zhenotdela TsK KP B AzSSR,” (Protokoly 2, 4, 5, 6. January–February 1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 221, ll. 1–42; V. Tseitlin, “O nashei rabote,” (1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 217, l. 153.

The situation changed only in the 1930s when the Soviet government introduced mixed-gender schools with male teachers of rural background who could freely study in the city and were more likely to return to their home village.

Table 4. Statistical table on the number of Azeri girls and boys enrolled in the elementary public schools between 1914 and 1929.¹²³

Years	1914/15	1919/20	1920/21	1921/22	1922/23	1923/24	1924/25	1925/26	1926/27	1927/28	1928/29
Azeri boys	20,299	15,201	32,240	36,830	35,830	46,322	60,134	68,424	69,051	75,917	78,844
Azeri girls	1,862	1,420	6,448	7,489	7,489	8,032	11,432	13,619	13,943	15,985	20,701
Total	22,162	22,162	38,688	44,319	44,319	54,354	71,566	82,043	82,994	91,902	99,545

The Azeri Soviet gender reformers and teachers, being deeply committed to Azerbaijan's modernization, extolled the universal affordability of Soviet new-style education that nurtured the new Soviet woman. As discussed elsewhere, the First All-Baku Party Conference in 1920 approved employment of the old intelligentsia for the benefit of the nation, but under strict Communist Party control.¹²⁴ However, over time, the Party position on this matter changed when in 1925, school curricula came increasingly under state control and supervision. Along with this,

¹²³ M. Guliyev, "Ob''iasnitel'naia zapiska k 5-tu letnemu planu vovlechenia devochek v nachal'nye shkoly," (September 6, 1929) ARDA f. 57, O. 1, d. 762, l. 19.

¹²⁴ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo*, 3 vols. (Baku, 1921), 2: 63; *Kommunist*, 1920, May 22 and September 30.

by the mid-1920s, the Azeri Soviet educational centres issued the first cohort of graduates who received four-year elementary training in the Soviet style. These female students immediately became literacy and elementary teachers.

After 1921, the Party organized 40 courses in Azerbaijan alone that aimed to prepare 237 future executive officers including 15 women.¹²⁵ By 1924, the share of the new cultural and political elite of Azeri origin increased from 16.8% to 60% among all state bureaucrats.¹²⁶ In March, 1926, TsIK AzCPb passed a special directive that required annual reporting on native Azeri intelligentsia promotions, emphasizing this as a state priority.¹²⁷ In 1927, only 37 people with university education and 267 with secondary education degrees gained before the Revolution remained among 27,058 Party members and candidates as compared with 1,000 in 1921.¹²⁸ The so-called *vydvizhentsi*, young specialists, nurtured within the Soviet system, replaced the members of the old intelligentsia.¹²⁹ Due to the official politics, the Commissariat of Enlightenment under the Communist Party's supervision began the crusade against teachers with any association with the religious and bourgeois past.

In 1927, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan declared an end to cooperation with the “old-regime associators,” demanding the end of the use of Azeri old intelligentsia in cultural-enlightenment work among women. The Party instructed *Zhenotdel's* workers to reduce the numbers of old-style influential women in the women's clubs and to attract young women of humble origin, *kesabchi*, *batrachki i bedniachki*, from the regions.¹³⁰ After 1927, many members

¹²⁵ *Kommunist*, 1921, December 8.

¹²⁶ *Otchetnye materialy BK AzKPb k XIII partconferentsii (26 April–4 May 1924)* (Baku, 1924), 25.

¹²⁷ *Bulliten BK AzKPb*. 1926, v. 3–4, 5.

¹²⁸ *Vsesouiznaia partinaia perepis' 1927*, Sbornik materialov. 8 vols. (Moscow, 1927), v:7, 54. The official Party census of January 10, 1927, presented these numbers within one million one hundred twenty five thousand Party members all over the Soviet Union.

¹²⁹ *Rezoluitsii IV Plenuma BK AzKPb (7–10 May 1928)*, (Baku, 1928), 6.

¹³⁰ *Rezoluitsii IV Plenuma BK AzKPb (7–10 May 1928)*, (Baku, 1928), 6–13.

of the old intelligentsia, including teachers and officials of the Muslim women's clubs and *Zhenotdel*, fell victim to intra-Party conflicts: they were accused of "petit-bourgeois bias and nationalism" and were expelled from their positions. The teachers that emerged in the early years of Bolshevik rule and particularly those whose world-view was formed by the old-Imperial reformist discourse had been gradually replaced by the new generation of educators.

In conclusion, the education of Azeri girls and women, along with the struggle for gender equality, began two decades before the Soviet movement for ending female illiteracy and the introduction of women's associations. The Soviet rhetoric of the 1920s on women and girls' education and empowerment had several similarities to Azeri late-Imperial reformist rhetoric. Like the Azeri reformers, the Soviet activists advocated for education for women and girls so that they could be good mothers, bringing up children in an enlightened way for the benefit of the nation. However, the most attractive argument for the Azeri liberal intellectuals was that the Bolsheviks referred to the need to establish public schools for girls as a state priority. As I argue elsewhere, the Azeri pre-revolution modernist discourse to promote innovative schooling, a didactic press, and societies for enlightenment, succeeded only in ethnically diverse Baku and its surroundings. The absolute lack of support from the Imperial government and dependency on oil-magnates' goodwill were the main reasons for the failure of the reforms in Azerbaijan.

For the Bolsheviks, the elimination of illiteracy among the Azeri female population was imperative for effective political indoctrination and thus, for political mobilization. In the early 1920s, the Soviet government educational apparatus accepted any literate person as a teacher to implement the politics of illiteracy elimination and to attract Azeri people to the Soviet emancipation drive by showing continuity with pre-revolution discourse and its promoters. Despite

the Soviet discourse that described old educational centres as the refuge of old capitalistic culture, and the previously-educated teachers as traditionalists, these educators were, nevertheless, the only literate agents of the Soviet project for enlightenment in the 1920s. However, since end of the 1920s this cohort of teachers and activists disappeared from the ranks of educators. Print media bolstered the image of educated at the non-Soviet schools female activists as unimportant. Thus, those who had connections to the old-imperial training began to deny any associations with the old system because of the risk of unemployment and imprisonment as an alien class. The new legion of Azeri Soviet instructors, who had no connections to the pre-revolution education system, acquired the central roles.

During the late-1920s, the numbers of Azeri girls and women in Soviet public schools rose spectacularly. One of the most important factors in this achievement was the foundation of public schools for girls with instruction in the Azeri language. Another factor was success in the program of illiteracy elimination among women at the women's clubs, bathhouses, private houses, and so-called *corners of knowledge* established for rural and nomadic women. The clubs were particularly successful because they not only trained women in literacy, but also produced teachers and activists who became deeply committed to Soviet modernization and equality for women. These Azeri women, such as A. Sultanova, D. Bairamova, G. Kadyrbekova, S. Efendiieva, and many others, formed the core of the Muslim female emancipation movement that brought an end to polygyny, early marriages, veiling, and gender segregation.

Chapter Four

Literature and the Journal “Sharg Gadini” as a Mirror of Gender Reforms in Azerbaijan

On the road to Azeri Turkic women’s liberation there are many obstacles, such as parochial old customs, nasty clerics, confrontations with the bourgeois Musavatists and passivity of the peasants. We need to employ the print media and literature to overcome these obstructions and to spread the seeds of the Communist values.

*The AzCPb’s instruction about propaganda work among the Azeri population.*¹

In Azerbaijan, the Soviet gender discourse of the 1920s resembled the modernist ideas of the old-Imperial Azeri reformers in many ways; both agencies aimed to end gender segregation, veiling, common illiteracy, and underage marriages. In the meantime, in the process of gender reformation, Soviet cultural and political leaders went far beyond pre-revolution reorganizers by pioneering equal rights for Muslim women in public life, work, payment, and land ownership. Moreover, they introduced courts and law enforcement executives who had to defend women’s personal and economic independence. To secure broad support for these reforms, Communist Party leaders and government officials appealed to the masses through the print media. In particular, the journal *Sharg Gadini*, *Woman of the East*, designed for Muslim women, sought to make the female population of Azerbaijan aware of their rights and to promote the Communist Party’s agenda to integrate Muslim women into the economic, political, and social life of the socialist state.

¹ “Tiurchanka v khudozhestvennoi literature Azerbaidzhana,” (September 17, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 754, l. 37.

This chapter focuses on the roles of Azeri literature and the journal *Sharg Gadini*, which juxtaposed images of the modern and backward Azeri woman, in an effort to convince Azeri society to embrace Soviet-style modernity. A close examination of the articles published in *Sharg Gadini* revealed that journal editors promoted the native's government radical approach to emancipating Muslim women rather than the official Moscow program for gradual gender reformation. This chapter also demonstrates that the journal, advancing the idea of the modern Azeri woman, did not always fit into the internationalist modernism of Moscow official discourse.

The Journal “Sharg Gadini”: The Conduit for Enlightening Values

In the 1920s, Azerbaijani Soviet reforms for Muslim women's emancipation represented two ideological frameworks, Communist and late-Imperial modernist. The Communist program specified the definitions of class, which does not know gender boundaries, and eternal class conflict to eradicate the remnants of patriarchal living. The late-Imperial modernist agenda aimed to convince society that proper female education contributes to society's morality and progress. By juxtaposing images of modern and backward Azeri woman, Azeri Soviet writers and gender activists, like their late-Imperial predecessors, popularized these ideas in print media. The journal *Sharg Gadini* became the major print organ that aimed to influence female members of Azeri society to embrace Soviet-style modernity.

The Azerbaijani Communist Party [AzCP(b)] and the *Zhenotdel* of Caucasus Bureau [CB] of the Communist Party were two major organizations that coordinated the activity of the journal

Sharg Gadini, designed specifically for Muslim women.² The members of the Azeri *Zhenotdel*, as discussed elsewhere, were women of various nationalities, however, the editors of *Sharg Gadini* were always Azeri women. Ayna Sultanova led the journal between 1923 and 1931. Gulara Kadyrbekova was its chief editor from 1931 to 1937. The main contributors to the journal were also exclusively Azeri female activists for gender reformation, such as Ayna Sultanova, Gulara Kadyrbekova, Peri Alieva, Alivia Babaeva, Khalida Gasimova, Aziza Dzafarzade, and Khanumnaz Alibekova. The famous Azeri female writers and poets, Shafiga Efendiieva, Mirvarid Dilbazi, and Nigar Rafibeili, wrote for the journal by providing articles and poems where they criticized veiling, women's seclusion, and illiteracy.



Figure 27. The editorial staff of the journal *Sharg Gadini*. Sitting from left to right: (unidentified person), M. Mirzoeva, Sh. Efendiieva, A. Sultanova, Kh. Azizbekova, and K. Ishkova. Standing from left to right: M. Akhundov, A. Karaev, F. Shlemova, and K. Shabanova-Karaeva, Baku, 1923. AAKFD photo.

² “Otchet otdela po rabote sredi zhenshchin s 7 fevralia po 20 maia 1921 goda,” (May 25, 1921) *Biulleten' Bakinskogo Komiteta AzKP(b)*, 7–9, 1921, 8–10.

Sharg Gadini began its life in 1920 as a wall newspaper for women, circulated bi-weekly at the “Ali Bairamov” and other clubs by the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* functionaries. On July 2, 1923, the TsIK AzCP[b] issued a decree about the establishment of the journal for Muslim women. In November 1923, the local *Zhenotdel* distributed first forty-page issue of one thousand copies.³ By giving the journal such a general name, *Sharg Gadini, Woman of the East*, Party officials stressed the enlightening goal of the journal, to liberate all Soviet Muslim women and girls from ignorance. The journal, in return, portrayed the *Zhenotdel* as a progressive agency that brought many positive changes to the ignorant society by eliminating veiling and female illiteracy at the women’s club. The journal also emphasized the role of the clubs in advancing Muslim women’s emancipation, and particularly the “Ali Bairamov” Club as a key player in the process of Muslim women’s liberation.⁴

The journal’s cover page is a valuable document itself because it reflects the development of Soviet gender reform in Azerbaijan. Between 1923 and 1926, the cover page of the journal depicted a chained oriental woman in odalisque attire who dreamily looks at the rising sun under a big red star and a sickle, the Communist symbols. Beginning in 1926, the cover page of the journal had only a title and the issue number; this simplicity represented the official and monotonous language of the articles dedicated to Communist cultural ambitions. In 1928, when the government of the Azerbaijan Republic initiated a campaign of rapid universal unveiling, the cover page of every issue illustrated modern Azeri women who had thrown their veils off. From the end of 1929 and onward, the journal’s cover page demonstrated happy Azeri female shock

³ K. Ishkova, “Ali Bairamov namina musul’man ischi gadinlar klubu,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1 (November 1923): 1–3.

⁴ K. Ishkova, “Ali Bairamov namina musul’man ischi gadinlar klubu,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1 (November 1923): 25; K. Ishkova, “Firkanin Azerbaijan gadinlari arasinda fealeiti,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 11 (1925): 2–5; Rustambekli, “Ali Bairamov namina Merkezi Turk Gadinlar Klubu,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8 (1924): 29–30; Ayna Sultanova, “Turk gadin klublari idare heiatlarenin sechkisini dair,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8–9 (1927): 4–5.

workers, pilots, engineers, athletes, and students, in this way emphasizing that the Communist Party fully liberated Muslim women, making them builders of the socialist state and absolutely equal to men.

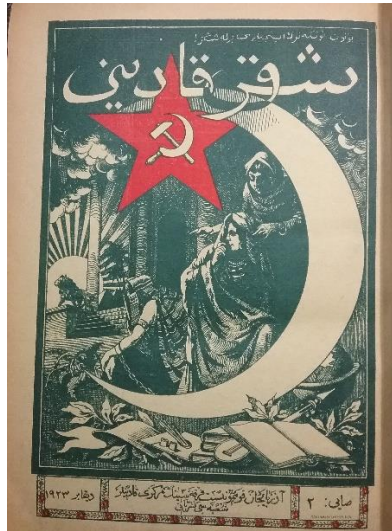


Figure 28. The cover pages of the journal *Sharg Gadini*, 1923, 1928, and 1929. Baku. Photo by author.

The journal *Sharg Gadini*, as indicated in its name, promoted the Communist Party official rhetoric that national republics were not to be sites of national chauvinism, that they were equal

partners in the Soviet Union on the road to internationalism. *Sharg Gadini*, being distributed among Soviet Turkic women, had to appeal to all eastern women of the Soviet Union, promoting their equivalent status among all nationalities, even doing this exclusively in the Azeri language.⁵ This standpoint was totally different from the approach of the other Muslim women's journals, which manifested the creation of a modern, progressive nation. For example, the Uzbek language media created images of Uzbekistan for Uzbeks, and the women's journal *Yangi Yo'l, New Path*, played an important role in defining Uzbek women and envisioning their relationship with the state of Uzbekistan.⁶ Such policy derived from the process of the definition of national borders all over the Soviet Union in 1922. In October 1924, Soviet government officials divided Turkestan into several republics. Soviet census officials regulated the presence of the major nationality groups in the territory of the former Russian Empire, in accordance with the lands they inhabited, and then established borders that would define new territorial entities, republics and autonomous regions. As Kamp demonstrates the women native to these entities, in particular "Uzbek women were no longer part of an undifferentiated mass of "eastern" women."⁷ In Uzbekistan, the journal *Yangi Yo'l* was created to represent the interests of Uzbek women and girls. Kamp concludes that in the mid-1920s "*Yangi Yo'l* inscribed womanhood with nationality and nation-building with gender" when the republican leaders referred to Uzbekistan as a country.⁸

In Azerbaijan, Party officials introduced the process of binding nation and gender significantly later. This process began in 1929 when Communist Party leaders presented a new paradigm of gender reform: as new citizens, women became as integral as men to the "ethnic

⁵Nasirli, "Turkmen gadinlari," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 5 (1924): 16–17; Kasparova, "Shergda gadin khereketi," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1 (1924): 35–36; Nasirli, "Uzbek gadinlara yeni heiata dogru," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7 (1924): 21–22; Karpovsakiia, "Turkestan gadinlari hayatinda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 11 (1924): 14–15.

⁶ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 97–99.

⁷ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 99.

⁸ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 99.

republic,” since the Soviet state and the Communist Party turned the titular nationalities across the Soviet Union into mobilized participants in building a socialist national entity.⁹ The new Soviet gender policy of 1929–1939 merged both gender and ethnicity in the creation of the nation state within the Azerbaijan Republic. Moscow-based and local government officials stopped distinguishing “culturally advanced” European women from “backward” Azeri Turkic or Muslim women. While promoting the image of *Azerbaijani women*, they ended describing the local female population as Muslim and Turkic. In this way, a new discourse emerged that emphasized that Azeri women ceased to be a part of the undistinguishable mass of oriental women. The culmination of these changes came in 1938 with the renaming of the journal *Sharg Gadini* into *Azerbaijan Gadini*, *Woman of Azerbaijan*, inscribing nation-building with womanhood in this way.

As discussed elsewhere, in Azerbaijan, the gender reforms of the 1920s represented two ideological frameworks, Communist and late-Imperial modernist. The Communist discourse prioritized class and class conflict over the gender issues to transform the society from patriarchal into modern. However, Azeri gender activists preferred to discuss and work on the improvement of Muslim women’s societal status through gender, rather than class. This difference was profoundly evident in the pages of *Sharg Gadini* and Russian-language journal *Kommunistka*: the latter argued that feminism was a bourgeois program of pre-revolution elite women and thus, distracts the Soviet female population from the class struggle.¹⁰ While the all-Soviet journal promoted the interests of working class women, the Azeri journal started to debate class difference and class conflict among women significantly later, in 1929.

⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 155, 357.

¹⁰ V. K., “Formy i metody massovoi raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei,” *Kommunistka* 9, September 1923, 67–75; *Dvenadtsati S’ezd RKP(b). April 17–25, 1923. Stenograficheskii otchet.* (Moscow, 1968), 724; Putilovskaia, “Rabota Kommunisticheskikh partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka,” *Kommunistka* 12–13, May–June 1921, 52–54.

Since the very first issue, *Sharg Gadini*'s editors stressed that the beneficiaries of Soviet-style liberation from patriarchal practices were all Muslim women, regardless of their societal status.¹¹ Azeri *Zhenotdel* leaders argued on the pages of *Sharg Gadini* that Azeri women collectively were more distinguished by cultural markers: literate versus illiterate, sedentary versus nomadic, urban versus rural, rather than by class. Contributors to *Sharg Gadini* were more devoted to the idea of the struggle of oppressed women against male enemies indoctrinated by Islamic covenants and patriarchal practices. Only at the end of the 1920s did the distinction between Party and non-Party Azeri women and between rich and poor women, and the wives of "alien elements" and those men devoted to the Soviet power, become the central characteristic in *Sharg Gadini*.¹²

Sharg Gadini also expressed a different position on the discussion on the role of religion in gender reforms from the Russian-language all-Union journal *Kommunistka*. In contrast to *Kommunistka*, the Azeri journal distinguished between superstition and religion, always emphasizing the purpose of female education for the good of motherhood, even doing this in the frame of the Soviet paradigm on a politically active female labor force.¹³ While *Kommunistka* was totally against any form of religious presence in the new socialist society, the *Sharg Gadini* journal editors did not produce strong antireligious proclamations but criticized only the radical clergy who interpreted Islamic covenants in a way that opposed women's emancipation.¹⁴

In 1926, the Azeri Soviet government unleashed a campaign that discredited the *mullahs*, and advocated the closing of all religious educational centres, along with the abolition of the Arabic

¹¹ "Azerbaijanda Aprel inglabi va gadinlar," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 4 (1927): 1–2; Xasaiet, "Turk gadinlar kollektiv teserrufatlatlarda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 6 (1929): 2.

¹² "Ischi va kendli gadinlari Azerbaijanda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8–9 (1927): 1–2; "Socialism jarish nedir ve ne djur duzeldilmelidir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10 (1929): 16–17; "Shura uzvu ischi va gendli gadinlarin umum ittifag gurultailari dair," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 12 (1927): 1–2.

¹³ "Aiile xeiatendaki ixtilaflarinin esas sebebleri," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 12; Imanzade, "Naxchivan olkasinde medeni hujum," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7 (1929): 16.

¹⁴ "Bizim igid gadinlar," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 4 (1925): 3–4; "Aiile xeiatendaki ixtilaflarinin esas sebebleri," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 12.

alphabet. *Sharg Gadini* and the republican central newspaper *Kommunist* were the first newsprints that changed their script from Arabic to Latin, beginning this process in 1926 and completely shifting to Latin in 1928. Azeri Communists considered the abolition of the archaic alphabet as an important part of the official state campaign against Islam, which aimed to put an end to the old way of thinking preserved by conservative clerics.¹⁵ It is important to admit that the Azerbaijani political elite, mostly consisting of late-Imperial and ADR politicians and intellectuals who strived for societal modernization and joined the Communist Party, gaining prominent leadership positions chose Latin script instead of Cyrillic for two important reasons. First, associating Cyrillic with the Tsarist past and linking themselves to the pro-Western late-Imperial enlighteners, the Azeri Communists aimed to continue those modernist ideas and to avoid the Russification promoted by the late tsarist regime.¹⁶ Second, the Azerbaijani gender reformers promoting Latinization, first in the women's journal and then in other print media, stressed the leading role of Muslim women in societal modernization.¹⁷

To spread the knowledge that the Communist regime was intolerant of patriarchal norms of living and stood at the guard of Muslim women, the journal had a specifically designed column called *Noksanlara Atesh, Fire at the Misconducts*. In that column, the editors and contributors reported about “crimes of daily life” — cases of forced marriage of minors and the sale of girls for *qalim*, bride money or valuable commodities paid by the bridegroom depending on his social status.¹⁸ The Azeri reporters brought to light cases concerning the men's abusive behavior towards

¹⁵ “Postanovleniia TsIK AzCPb ob obiazatel'nom i okonchatel'nom vvedenii novogo alphavita,” (February 15, 1928–January 13, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 613, ll. 1–11; U. Aliev, “Pobeda Latinizatsii- luchshaia pamiat' o tov. Agamali-ogli,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* no. 7(1930): 17–28.

¹⁶ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 177, 188–189; Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, 211–213.

¹⁷ “Yeni Turk alifbasinin kuchuri tedbiki khakkinda,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7–8 (1928): 1–2; “Yeni Turk alifbasinin medchburi tedbiki xakkinda,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 1–2.

¹⁸ “Ganayet gurbanlar,” *Noksanlara Atesh, Sharg Gadini*, no. 6–7 (1928): 9.

women also warned about legal penalties for harassment of women.¹⁹ It is important to note that the *Sharg Gadini* contributors evaluated the cases of violence against Muslim women as violence against women and domestic violence stressing that abusers do not have ethnicity. Unlike local editors, the Moscow-based officials and journalists promoted a discourse in which Muslim women traditionally suffered from abusive men more than non-Muslim women. The latter ones built this discourse mostly using files that came from the records of Azeri *Zhenotdel* branches and were related only to Azeri women and silencing the facts of abuse of Armenian, Russian and other non-Muslim women.²⁰

However, considering the publication of the Russian-language women's periodicals *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa*, which also illustrated widespread interfamilial and political violence, it is clear that Russian women suffered as much as their Azeri female contemporaries from abusive patriarchy. These Russian women's journals, unlike the official Party reports and the all-union journal *Kommunistka*, presented the cases of abuse towards Slavic women who opposed the male-centric traditional society more accurately. Such Russian authors as P. Dorokhov, V. Gorshkov, G. Kuzmichev, N. Alekseeva, and others, illustrated the difficult life of the Russian peasant woman who suffered from a sadistic mother-in-law, alcoholic husband, and oppressive customs. These editors and contributors to the journals for Russian women truly described all cases of atrocities

¹⁹ "Khugugi sual va chavablar," *Sharg Gadini* 4 (1929): 21–22; "Khugug meslehetlari," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 6–7 (1929): 2–4; Nazli khanum, "Shekhsi tenkid ateshi altinda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8–9 (1928): 17–19; "Azadlig iolunda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 11 (1928): 1–3.

²⁰ E. Stasova, "Protokol 4-go soveshchaniia po rabote sredi zhenshchin musul'manok," (29 September 1920). RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 40, ll. 7–8; K. Ishkova, "Itogi soveshchania zaveduiushchikh i instruktorov otdelov rabotnits Azerbaidzhana," *Kommunistka*, no. 10 (October 1923): 45–47; V. Kasparov, "Zadachi partii v oblasti raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei," *Kommunistka*, no. 7 (June–July 1925): 86–92; A. Nukhrat, "Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov zhenskikh klubov," *Kommunistka*, no. 9 (September 1926): 12–14; G. Kadyrbekova, "Protokol tov. Shigaieva o zakonodatel'stve po perezhitkam rodovogo byta," (15 January 1928) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, l. 13.

and harassment as the remnants of strong patriarchal traditions in Russian society, particularly in the rural areas of Soviet Russia.²¹

As the history of humanity shows, every society that experienced the agricultural revolution and technological development, which led to surplus, societal hierarchy, and creation of state, encouraged the limitation of women's rights and societal roles. According to Friedrich Engels, the advance of patriarchal relations began with the establishment of tradition that requires to pass property in the male line. Thus, to eliminate any concerns about fatherhood the patriarchy imposes strict control of women's chastity to minimize their contact with men who are not related to family.²² It is also true that long before the establishment of Islam, many agriculturally and technologically developed Middle Eastern cultures of the pre-Muslim period and ancient European Greek and Roman civilizations established veiling and gender segregation to control women. In those class-structured societies, veiling and seclusion became one of the social markers for urban middle- and upper-class women, showing that they did not have to perform manual or sexual work like low-class women or female slaves.²³ Thus, the arrangements between genders and social ranks produced different systems of male dominance, Islamic and non-Islamic patriarchy, that are equally responsible for gender inequality and women's subordination.

The official Soviet discourse, which stated that Muslim women suffered more than European women, can also be explained by long-established public opinion which tended to present Muslim women as victims. As Nikki R. Keddie argues, this viewpoint came from the ideological differences and hostilities between Islamic and European cultures. Keddie stresses that

²¹ "Pogibla v bor'be za novuiu zhizn," *Krest'ianka*, no. 10 (1925): 10; P. Dorokhov, "Novaia zhizn," *Krest'ianka*, no.4 (1923): 11; O. Sokolova, "Kto takaia tov. Utkina i za chto ee ubili," *Krest'ianka*, no. 5 (1925): 22; N. Ark, "Ubiistvo kustarki-obshchestvennitsy," *Krest'ianka*, no. 12 (1928): 11; V. Gorshkov, "Bab'ia pesnia," *Rabotnitsia*, no. 4 (1925): 25; G. Kuz'michev, "Chastushki rabotnitsy," *Rabotnitsia*, no. 3 (1926): 17; E-va, "Krasnyi Oktiabr'," *Rabotnitsia*, no. 34 (1927): 7; N. Alekseeva, "Mertvyi khvataet zhivogo," *Rabotnitsia*, no. 7 (1928): 14–15.

²² Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 36.

²³ Keddie, *Women in the Middle Eastern History*, 2–3.

Western beliefs about the Islamic world exaggerate only negative traits, particularly of gendered relationships, such as women's seclusion, veiling and polygyny, that presumably force women to "live without meaning or satisfaction."²⁴

Along with this, Edward W. Said's term *Orientalism* also defines cultural distinctions between the European and Islamic worlds. *Orientalism* became the starting point for Western civilization to introduce scientific theories, novels, social narratives, and political justifications concerning the Orient, its people, and customs. According to the theory of *Orientalism*, the Islamic world was extremely primitive, violent, despotic, irrational, inferior, and governed by lust. Thus, enlightened Europeans felt obliged to bring "progressive and contemporary Western enlightenment" to the reactionary Oriental world to civilize it.²⁵ The Russian Communists, like their Imperial predecessors, believed in their enlightening mission to rescue Muslim people, and in particular Muslim women, from the oppressive Islamic laws and norms of living, emphasizing this mission in the Party protocols and women's journals.

In the 1920s, Azeri editors and journal contributors explained violence towards Muslim women as an attempt of the patriarchy to keep female family members in submission, opposing their desire to study or work outside home.²⁶ Male family heads, regardless of social status, took advantage of norms of conduct in Islamic society, presuming that men could dictate women's public role and dress. From 1929 on, *Sharg Gadini* transformed this image of an ordinary abusive man into a class enemy; this coincided with the period of collectivization, a consolidation of individual peasant landholdings and labor into collective farms, so called *kolkhozes*.

²⁴ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 10.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New-York: Random House, Inc. 1978), 20–24.

²⁶ F. Hadji zade, "Er-arvad," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9 (1924): 11–12.

By introducing collectivization of the agrarian sector, the Stalinist government aimed to boost agricultural production and liberate poor peasants from economic servitude to the land owners, *kulaks*, in this way completing the class war and totally end patriarchal relationships in the rural world.²⁷ While in the early and mid-1920s the journal's articles claimed that only backward men oppressed women, in 1929, the journal editors introduced a new image of an oppressor – a man affiliated with clergy, wealth, and former nobility. Starting in 1929, *Sharg Gadini* articles systematically revealed that the local *Zhenotdel's* reports linked male abusers with the “alien class” of the former nobility and the clergy. They presented those cases as a result of a female fight against enslavement imposed by wealthy men and clerics, along with a female desire to gain economic and social independence.²⁸

The journal also paid considerable attention to the question of an appropriate age of marriage for girls, with the mission to increase public awareness of the new laws since women's societal status in Azerbaijan had significantly changed. In 1923, the Azerbaijani Civil Code on Family, Marriage, and Child Support declared that only those new marriages registered at civil offices, ZAGS, would be regarded as legitimate, although it did recognize all the religious marriages arranged before 1920.²⁹ Divorce became possible on the demand of one of the spouses regardless of their gender and could be obtained through court procedure. The Soviet code also increased the minimum age for marriage from 13 to 16 for women and from 15 to 18 for men set

²⁷ Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde: Stalinism na Kavkaze*, 617–618.

²⁸ Simurg, “Azadlig uchun jinaiet,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10–11 (1927): 68–71; “Turk gadinlara jolunu kesme,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8 (1929): 17; Safi, “Jenaiet gurbani,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2 (1929): 23–25.

²⁹ *Istoria gosudarstva i prava v Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR (1920–1934)* (Baku: AzGiz, 1973), 327–335; E. Zakhar'ian, “Brachnoe i semeinoe pravo na Vostoke,” *Kommunistka*, no. 3 (February–March 1926): 42–45.

previously by the Civil Code of the Russian Empire.³⁰ This also was remarkably different from the *Sharia* norms allowing marriages among minors.³¹

The Criminal Code of 1926 qualified polygyny, child marriage, bride-money, and marriage by coercion as criminal acts and introduced imprisonment from three to ten years for those who exercised old matrimonial traditions violating the Soviet regulations.³² *Sharg Gadini* highlighted the *Zhenotdel's* activity as the main means by which the Party and state enforced the new legislative principles. The journal constantly stressed that the agency worked for Muslim women's benefits. *Sharg Gadini* editors promoted the activity of legal instructors who explained the advantages of the new legislation and women's rights in the family across the republic.

It is important to admit that in discussing the appropriate age of marriage, the Azeri contributors to *Sharg Gadini* connected it to the stage of psychological maturity rather than to the age of physical development. This point of view was different from the standpoint of their counterparts in Soviet Uzbekistan who paid more attention to the physical development of young women. The doctors of Soviet Uzbekistan, such as Anel Asfendarova and Izzedine Seifulmuluk, wrote plaintively against early marriage. They structured their arguments comparing the age of puberty of Uzbek girls and girls in the South Caucasus, not specifying the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the latter. The Central Asian doctors asserted that while girls in the South Caucasus entered the period of puberty by age 10, the records of doctors showed that Uzbek girls typically began to menstruate at age 15 or 16. Thus, they concluded that Uzbek girls should not be married until their bodies were fully developed to bear children without difficulties, which is possible for

³⁰ *Polnyi svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, ed. A. A. Dobvol'skii, 16 vols. (Saint-Petersburg: Zakonovedenie, 1911), 2: 757.

³¹ *Khidaia, kommentarii musul'manskogo prava*, 4 vols. (Tashkent, 1893), 2: 156–160.

³² N. Tagieva, "Rezoliutsia po protokolu tov. Shigaieva o zakonodatel'stve po perezhitkam rodovogo byta," (15 January 1928) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, l. 18.

young women only between the ages of 18 and 21. The doctors from Uzbekistan concluded that the marriage of prepubescent girls represented not only a native backwardness but also led to the “degeneration of nation” because the result of such unions would be defective children.³³

Azeri gender reformers and the *Sharg Gadini* editors, unlike their Uzbek colleagues, did not employ medicine in asserting the proper age for marriage. The Azeri journal contributors prioritized psychological development over bodily development for maternity benefits, which was a direct outcome of the pre-revolution discourse. They stressed that early marriage was the major obstacle to raising the educational level of every woman and her children and thus, a *millat*.³⁴ In this way, the journal advocated the pre-revolution discourse presuming that eradicating illiteracy was essential for effective societal modernization. Nevertheless, the authors in *Sharg Gadini* employed ideas about medicine in denouncing another societal evil, namely the veil, as the fundamental issue and symbol of female isolation.

As it was discussed elsewhere, veiling was culturally specific among certain groups of the Azeri Muslim population. Among Azeri women, those of the urban communities, Baku, Ganja, and Lenkoran, wore a face- and body-covering veil, *chadra*. To signal their presence in the street, Muslim women in *chadras* wore wooden clogs that produced noise and warned men to yield the sidewalk.³⁵ In contrast, rural and nomadic women who worked in the fields and moved the herds from summer to winter pasturelands neither covered their faces nor wrapped their bodies. They wore the head scarf, *kelagaia*, and others forms of head scarves as sign of modesty.³⁶ In 1928,

³³ Cassandra Marie Cavanaugh, “Backwardness and Biology: Medicine and Power in Russian and Soviet Central Asia, 1868-1934” (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 2001), 253–258.

³⁴ M. T. Oruclu, “Aile heiaindaki ikhtilafarin esas sebebleri,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8–9 (1928): 12–13; “Siasi maarif ishlerin esasi savadsizigi legv etmek ishidir,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 12 (1926): 4–5; “Kirmizi Azerbajanda Turk gadin maarifi,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2 (1924): 36–48; Gulara Goilu kizi Kadirbekova, “Gadin azadligia va zialarimiz,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 12 (1925): 27–28.

³⁵ S. Agamali-oglu, *Namus v zatvornicheskikh obshchestvakh islamskogo mira* (Baku: Azgiz, 1929), 11.

³⁶ *Azerbaycan Etnoqrafiyası*. 3 vols. (ŞƏRQ-QƏRB: Baku, 2007), on different headcover styles, 2:130. On *chadra*, *ibid.* 2:136.

Azeri Communists and intellectual elites initiated a campaign for the rapid abolition of the *chadra* and reflected on their achievements and advancements in the socialist society on the pages of *Sharg Gadini*.³⁷

The editors of *Sharg Gadini* employed medical reasons, with support from Soviet doctors, claiming that veiling and a secluded lifestyle provoked various female ailments, from respiratory diseases to slowed fetal development during a pregnancy.³⁸ Another argument was that veil-wearing violated workplace safety rules, because it could cause injury and suffocation.³⁹ In the meantime, journal contributors always stressed that unveiling did not lead to loss of morality among women, and tried to ease the societal tensions aroused, in particular among the urban community of Baku city. Thus, most of *Sharg Gadini*'s articles focused on new laws and the problems with their enforcement. The journal's editorial column, *Noksanlara Atesh*, exposed those who harassed women and provided reports from courts that guarded female honor and rights.⁴⁰ This innovative tactic to protect and promote women's rights in the print media and literature established new power relations within the patriarchal Islamic society.

³⁷ "Rett olsun chadra shuari hejata kecherilir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 20–22; "Rett olsun chadra kompaniiasi netecelerinden jeqynlar," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 23–24.

³⁸ "Chadradan istexsalata," "Emekchi Turk gadini ozunu chadradan xilas edir," "Chadranin axirinchi nefesidir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–2 (1929): 1–7. Doctor Koldberg, "Abort (ushag saldirmag) nedir?," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–2 (1929): 20.

³⁹ Markovitch, "Doklad o rabote proizvodstvennykh iacheek Bakinskoi organizatsii TsIK," (12 October 1925) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 63, l. 27.

⁴⁰ Xasalet, "Turk gadinlar kollektiv teserrufatlatlarda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 6 (1929): 2; Imanzade, "Naxchivan olkasinde medeni hujum," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7 (1929): 16; "Socialism jarish nedir ve ne djur duzeldilmelidir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10 (1929): 16–17.

The Image of Azeri Women in Azeri Soviet Literature

Azeri Soviet gender reformers were deeply committed to Azerbaijan's modernization, and encouraged the dismissal of the old lifestyle by glorifying the universal affordability of Soviet new-style education, which shaped a modern woman. The novels and plays produced during the 1920s by Azeri writers, comparing the old life to the new life, education versus ignorance, agitated for the benefits of Soviet education to Muslim young women. This manifestation resonates with the pre-revolution discourse that opposed *qaranliq*, ignorance, against *ishig*, enlightenment. In Azerbaijani literature there are two outstanding plays that echo this pre-revolution Azeri discussion about the need for Muslim women's education and empowerment.

In 1928, the Azeri playwright Dzhafar Dzhabbarli (1899–1934) wrote two novels, entitled *Almas* and *Sevil*, that described the various tensions and cultural influences that shaped the life of the Soviet Azeri woman. These two works greatly contributed to the campaign for Muslim women's enlightenment. The plays were a part of the school curriculum throughout the Soviet period, and still are in the school program in modern Azerbaijan. The plays take a strong anti-clerical position that is more reflective of the secularist discourse of the late-imperial Azeri reformers for the benefit of enlightened women, mothers, and thus *millat*, rather than the atheism of the Soviet ideology. The plays illustrate the character development of two young women named Almas and Sevil during the late 1920s.

Almas, the main character of the novel of the same name, is a young schoolteacher who returns from the city to her village to teach at a new school. She is sincerely devoted to the Soviet mission to eliminate the old patriarchal way of life through the introduction of public female

education, the change of women's status, and redistribution of wealth.⁴¹ She struggles not only against the old customs, but also against the opportunism and abuses of those Soviet officials who came from the old wealthy families. She also fights the immoral Islamic priests who lure women at the mosques and she calls for the transformation of these spiritual centres into women's clubs to end parochial male-dominated influence.⁴² The play, written in very plain language, aimed to inspire Azeri Muslim women in their empowerment. The official report that discussed the role of literature in shaping public disposition indicates that the Soviet authorities decided to propagandize this play all over the Soviet Union.⁴³ To broaden its ideological appeal, Soviet officials produced a film based on this play in 1929 that was shown across the Soviet Union. The film was one of the first films produced at the *Azerbaijan Film Studio*, which was established in 1920 in Baku, and later named after D. Dzhabbarli.

It is important to note that the play *Almas* does not debate the issue of veiling. This can be explained by the fact, discussed elsewhere, that rural Azeri women did not wear a veil. However, in another play entitled *Sevil*, the issue of veiling, along gender equality, is the central subject.⁴⁴ Because of its focus on the important issue of Muslim women's empowerment, the play *Sevil* was and still is very popular in Azerbaijan.⁴⁵ Unlike *Almas*, the play's main character, *Sevil*, became a symbol of the modern Azeri woman: educated, skilled, career-minded, independent, and passionate about gender equality. The popularity of this character also can be explained by the fact that *Sevil*'s personal and societal achievements were a result of her hard work and dedication to

⁴¹ Dzhafar Dzhabbarly, *Almas, Eserleri*, 4 vols. (Baku: Sharg-Garb, 2005), 3: 55–144.

⁴² Dzhabbarly, *Almas, Eserleri*. 4 vols., 3: 55–144.

⁴³ "Razbor literatury o zhenshchinakh tiurchankakh," (September 17, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 754.

⁴⁴ Dzhafar Dzhabbarly, *Sevil, Eserleri*. 4 vols., 3: 7–55.

⁴⁵ There are two films based on the play, produced in 1929 and 1970, respectively. In 1949, an Azeri composer, Fikrat Amirov, wrote an opera named *Sevil*. The play is always in the repertoire of every Azeri theatre.

her goals. She had to overcome many hardships, such as poverty and a narrow-minded, abusive husband, to become successful.

The play narrates the story of Sevil, a 19-year-old illiterate young mother. She is married at the age of 13 to a man named Balash, an employee at the Soviet state bank in Baku, and a former trader. Balash likes to spend his time at the casinos and bars. He has an affair with an Azeri woman named Edilia. Edilia came from a bourgeois family. She is fluent in Russian and French. Edilia received training as a beautician in Paris. She likes to spend time at the restaurants and dresses in a fashionable, Western style. Balash admires her and, spending more money on her than he can earn, needs to perform several fraudulent activities at his bank to have additional income. Unlike Edilia, Sevil is always at home caring for her little son and the house. She wears *chadra* in front of non-family male guests, does not go outside, and in accordance with Balash's words, acts more like a servant to her husband rather than a *friend of life, haiat joldashi*.

Balash is also unhappy with the behavior of his sister, Guliush. Guliush is a member of one of the Soviet women's clubs and struggles to end Muslim women's unprivileged societal position. She tries to improve Sevil's life, and her marriage as a whole, by changing her sister's-in-law attitude to female status in a family. However, Sevil argues that she must obey her husband because *er, Allahin kolgesidir*, a husband is a shadow of God. This response makes Guliush angry: she argues that if God exists, he will never put a Muslim woman, one of his children, in such an underprivileged position. She advises Sevil to stop wearing *chadra* and to go to school to become independent, to survive the upcoming era of cultural transformation, *medeniat zelzelesi*. Sevil soon realizes the truth of these words when her husband announces his intentions to divorce her and marry Edilia. Balash throws Sevil out of their house. Their son, in accordance with Islamic and local traditions discussed elsewhere, is left with his father. Since Sevil is uneducated, left without

alimony and deprived of seeing her son, she has to become a domestic servant at someone's household to survive.

Guliush, who works as a kindergarten teacher, is extremely disappointed with the carelessness of her new sister-in-law toward her nephew and takes care of him for several (unspecified) years. On his tenth birthday, she organizes a birthday party. Guliush bitterly notices that her brother's new marriage is not happy as a result of Edilia's frivolous behavior with other men and total neglect of her husband, stepson, and their home. Balash loses his job at the bank because of his fraudulent operations, which ruins his reputation. Later, during the party, Sevil arrives to see her son. She looks modern and behaves confidently. She explains these changes by saying that she went to work at a factory and began to study the literacy courses organized at the women's club. For her achievements, the Party granted her a scholarship to study at the university in Moscow where she lives now. She came for her son's birthday party to present him with her gift, a toy airplane. She proposes to her son that he act in his life like this airplane, to bravely overcome all earthly forces to achieve his dreams. Balash is amazed by the image of a modern woman and without any apology proposes that Sevil remarry him. Sevil categorically rejects him, denouncing his consumeristic attitude to women, and finishes her speech with the glorification of the Soviet achievements in women's liberation, culture, and science.⁴⁶

For many Muslim women, who experienced humiliation from male family heads and lived as powerless creatures, the play *Sevil* became an inspiration in their struggle to end isolation, illiteracy, and veiling. As Ayna Sultanova recalled, after reading this play or watching the film, many Muslim women abandoned their *chadras* and went to study in schools and courses organized at the clubs to become educated and skilled individuals.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Dzhabbarly, *Sevil, Eserleri*. 4 vols., 3: 7–55.

⁴⁷ A. Sultanova, *Schastlivy zhenshchiny Sovetskogo Azerbajjana* (Baku: AzGiz, 1964), 120.

Even though the plays *Almas* and *Sevil* manifest all the elements of socialist realist literature that glorifies technology, industry, and Soviet feminism, and critiques the old patriarchal way of living, they also resemble features of the pre-revolutionary understanding of the role of education for the woman's and nation's benefit. *Sevil*, in particular, reflects the Azeri modernists' perception that a modern woman must be educated and publicly active, but she should not ignore the other moral demands of Azeri society. Dzhabbarli introduced the character of Edilia to criticize those women who understood the newly acquired liberties incorrectly. Instead of using their freedom to gain an education and new skills, these women preferred to mix freely with men, wear décolletage, sleeveless, and short dresses, cut their hair, begin smoking, and forget their wifely and motherly duties while living in mixed-gender society. The author presented them negatively, emphasizing that such outcomes came from a lack of proper education, and as a result, such morally disoriented women were always left without family, jobs, or societal respect. The plays *Almas* and *Sevil* mirrored the reformists' discourse, which did not aim to challenge traditional gendered social norms around female chastity. It stated that Azeri women and girls still had to maintain their *namus* and not to bring any shame to their families by becoming morally corrupt while living in a mixed-gender environment.

Other Azeri writers, namely Dzhahalil Mamedkulizade, Mehdi Gusein, Abdulla Shaik, and Tagi Shahbazi Simurg, also wrote novels that compared backward and modern women, publishing some of them in the journal *Sharg Gadini*. The stories emphasized a Muslim young woman's desire to study against the will of her retrograde parents, brothers, and husbands who advocated for traditional women's roles.⁴⁸ The moral of all stories published in the mid-1920s was that those young women who had opposed their backward relatives would become teachers, nurses, or

⁴⁸ Dzhahalil Mamedkulizade, "Kokhne derdim," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10 (1924); "Iki Er," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10–11 (1927); Mekhti Gusein, "Goiun gyrkhimi," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–11 (1926).

engineers, and could support themselves and even their old ailing parents later in life, while those who followed their parents' advice to stay passively at home were left in miserable conditions when they lost their husbands due to illness or divorce.⁴⁹

The writers of two neighboring countries, Turkey and Iran, which also went through a period of societal transformation, also employed literature to promote the reforms of women's status in Islamic societies. In Turkey, since the late-Ottoman period (1900–1918), the writers were divided into Islamist, Westernist, and Turkist positions. The first group opposed gender reformation while the latter two favored it.⁵⁰ The pro-Western authors, Sinasi, Namik Kemal, Sabakhaddin Ali, and others, argued in their works that the introduction of equal rights and modern education for women and young girls would eliminate the oppressive aspects of traditional marriage and the family. Those men of letter also made Muslim women responsible for societal stagnation because of their idleness and ignorance.⁵¹ Unlike those writers, the female editors of the women's journal *Kadinlar Duniasy, Women's World*, (1913–1921) argued that men and patriarchy were responsible for women's subordination. To change women's societal status, the contributors proposed Western models of the gender reorganization: the introduction of women into the labor force, equal pay, voting rights, and equality in marriage and the family.

In 1923, after the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the new discourse that favored pro-Turkist ideals around women's role in society became dominant. Atatürk (1881–1938), one of the founders of the Republic of Turkey and its first President, abolished Islam as a state religion, introduced secular co-education, limited access to

⁴⁹ Abdulla Shaik, "Nushabe," "Anabaci," *Sechilmish eserleri* (Baku: Giandzhlik, 1984) Tagi Shahbazi Simurg, "Zarife," "Kulekli bir akhsham," "Meshedi Gedimin evinde bedbekhtlik," "Azadlig uchun dzinaiet," in *Khekailar* (Baku: Azerneshr, 1930).

⁵⁰ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 81.

⁵¹ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 25–26.

the gender-inegalitarian Arabic and Ottoman texts and promoted Turkishness.⁵² One of the ideological fathers of Atatürk's gender reforms, Ziya Gökalp, advocated "Turkish feminism." He called for a return to pre-Islamic Turkic societal norms that encouraged women's power, even in warfare. Like the old-Imperial Azeri intellectuals, M. F. Akhundov and A. Agayev, Gokalp claimed that Arabic and Islamic influence undermined Turkic women's liberties. The Turkish writers of the 1920s followed Gokalp in this rhetoric, arguing that women's education and equality were important assets to a new Turkey.⁵³

In Iran, starting in 1920, native writers also produced literary works that promoted an image of enlightened and publicly active women for the benefit of the whole nation. The Iranian writers Mohamed Ali Jamalsadeh, Iraj Mirza, and Sadeg Hedayat, like their Azeri counterparts, compared the traditional woman, degraded by early marriage and ignorance, with the modern, educated woman. The editors and contributors to the newspapers *Shafag-i-Sorkh*, *Red Aurora*, and *Nahid*, *Venus*, promoted the model of Western type modernity based on mixed-gender education and women's rights in the workforce and family.⁵⁴ The Iranian press of the 1920s discussed the harmful aspects of veiling and polygyny, promoting ideas about the reorganization of gender roles that were finally realized during the reformative period of Reza Shah Pahlavi, 1936–1941.⁵⁵ Hence, in the 1920s, Soviet Azerbaijan was not unique in experiencing gender reformation as reflected in and endorsed by literary works.

In conclusion, the Azeri writers and the contributors of the journal *Sharg Gadini*, like their late-Imperial predecessors, believed that the introduction of education to Muslim women would

⁵² Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 82.

⁵³ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 83–84.

⁵⁴ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture 1865–1946* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 78–79.

⁵⁵ Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 80–82.

be beneficial for both family and nation, *millat*. *Sharg Gadini* played an important role, covering the issues of illiteracy and backwardness. The editors, continuing the old-Imperial discourse against patriarchal traditions, connected the negative consequences of child-marriage with the problem of eliminating illiteracy. The journal editors argued that early marriage was the major obstacle in raising the educational level of every woman and her children. In this way, the journal blended late-Imperial rhetoric with the Communist Party politics that claimed that the eradication of illiteracy was essential for effective political communication and societal modernization. While ethnically diverse *Zhenotdel* leaders stood for the Party program for women's empowerment through their involvement in the workforce, *Sharg Gadini's* exclusively Azeri native editors continued to promote education as an only means of liberation. *Sharg Gadini* combined pre-revolution and Soviet rhetoric: women were seen as "mothers of the nation, *millat*", women suffered from the patriarchal oppression, and women empowered by the new rights to end the dictate of patriarchy.

While the official discourse always stressed that a modern woman must be educated and publicly active, the native writers reminded that woman should not ignore the important moral demands of Azeri society. Azeri women and girls still had to preserve their *namus* and not jeopardize the reputation of their families and communities by becoming immoral while living in a mixed-gender environment. The journal also promoted the legal regulations to defend them by exposing incidents of atrocities against women and girls committed by abusive men. By criticizing the abusers and popularizing court cases, the journal made two fundamental shifts in the gendered power relations of traditional Islamic society: Muslim women obtained access to law and the courts equally with men; and Muslim women had a direct relationship with the state. This approach

marked the Soviet policy accomplishments by granting Muslim women equal opportunities to gain legal aid in defending their newly-acquired freedoms.

Chapter Five

The Thorny Road to Liberation

It was much easier to explain a veil than to answer questions about the wounds.

Pawan Mishra¹

The late-Imperial discourse about the introduction of women's rights and the abolition of the veil made a significant contribution to raising awareness about gender equality in Soviet Azerbaijan. Azeri feminists and male reformers welcomed the Soviet state program to accelerate societal transformation through granting women legal rights and severely punishing those men who went against the reforms. In 1928, Azeri government officials declared that modernity was incompatible with veiling and inequality. Unveiling became a topic of public argument and conflict in Azeri society. The proponents of immediate veil abolition, generally presented by early Azerbaijani Imperial reformers and female graduates of the *Tagiev school*, considered it a symbolic act of woman's departure from the patriarchal past. Opponents to prompt *chadra* eradication, Moscow-appointed Communist officials, stood for the gradual abolition that would be an outcome of public education and women's introduction to the socialist labor force.

This episode in the history of the Soviet program to modernize Azeri society through rapid *chadra* abolition challenges two dominant historiographical accounts. First, the Soviet version, which credits the Communist Party's program and Moscow-imposed officials for the liberation of backward Muslim women through unveiling. This discourse glorifies Soviet cultural policies that

¹ Pawan Mishra, *Coinman: An Untold Conspiracy* (Morrisville, NC: Lune Spark LLC, 2015), 190.

made Azeri women emancipated and excludes the Azeri agency from the process of gender reorganization.² The second account, which became dominant from 1991 and the downfall of Communist rule in Azerbaijan and which advanced the people's determination to assess their past and future, is maintained by Western and modern-day Azeri historians. This group of scholars argue that mass unveiling was an exclusively Moscow-initiated program that cruelly subjected a powerless Muslim populace to a totally alien and uninvited cultural transformation.³ These both of interpretations are united in one aspect: the reluctance to recognize Azeri male and female agencies in *chadra* abolition and the acquisition of equal rights.

This chapter examines Azeri agency in unveiling and Azeri women's empowerment. It also investigates the implementation of Soviet gender policies focusing on conflict among regional and central Communists, divided by ideology, religion, and ethnicity. It demonstrates the debates and confrontations between the Azerbaijani gender activists, whose worldview stemmed from the pre-Soviet gender discourse, and the Moscow officials, in pursuit of legal equality and particularly unveiling. This chapter also examines the development of Soviet reorganization, particularly the agrarian reform that elevated Azeri women's societal position in a village, and resistance to these reforms initiated by patriarchal societal and family leaders to preserve their power and social status. By analyzing the court documents of the late 1920s, this part of the study investigates the

² A. S. Beliaeva, *Zhenskie sovety* (Moscow: Mysl', 1962); Bibi Pal'vanova, *Emansipatsiia musul'manki: opyt raskreposhcheniia zhenshchiny Sovetskogo Vostoka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982); Gleb Snesarev, *Raskreposhchenie zhenshchiny Sovetskogo Vostoka ot gnetia religii* (Moscow: Gosizdat SSSR, 1939); N. I. Dubinina, *Pobeda velikogo Oktiabria i pervie meropriiata partii v reshenii zhenskogo voprosa* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981); Yelena Yemelianova, *Revoliutsiia v zhenskoj zhizni* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1985); Evgabel', *Bor'ba za osvobozenie zhenshchiny Vostoka i religii* (Moscow: Gosizdat SSSR, 1935).

³ N. Tohidi, *Soviet in Public, Azeri in Private: Gender, Islam, and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).; Gulzar Ibrahimova, *Azerbaijan gadini: tarih ve gerceklik*. (Baku: Elm, 2009); S. Mammedova and Bagirov, Kh, *Soyqirim analardan bashlanir* (Baku: Vatan, 2003); A. Muradova, *Vovlechenie zhenshchiny Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR v organy gosudarstvennoi vlasti* (Baku: Nurlan, 2007); Jörg Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde: Stalinizm na Kavkaze* (Moskva: Rosspen: Fond "Prezidentskii tsentr B. N. El'tsina", 2010).

causes of the murders of emancipated Azeri women, and the consequences of these murders on the Soviet gender campaign for Muslim women's emancipation.

Soviet Law on Guard for a New Azeri Woman

Women's status in the Azeri community changed gradually through a series of compromises between *Sharia*, secular regulations dating to the late Imperial and ADR periods, and new Soviet legal initiatives. Introducing legal equality in Azerbaijan, the Bolshevik government, considered it to be a leading force in societal transformation. Soviet civil law aimed to overthrow patriarchal traditions and customs and totally change Muslim women's societal and family positions. Azeri female gender reformers initiated the legal changes that brought an end to the old family traditions. In 1921, at the First Congress of Eastern Women, held in Baku, they issued a resolution to end early and polygamous marriages. In 1922, the female delegates of the Congress of Transcaucasian Women, also organized in Baku and representing the work of 4,000 *Zhenotdel* activists, passed several decrees that separated religious laws from marriage and divorce.⁴ In 1926, the Azerbaijani Civil Code on Family, Marriage and Child-Support increased the minimum age for marriage, set previously by the Civil Code of the Russian Empire, from 13 to 16 for women and from 15 to 18 for men.⁵ This also was remarkably different from the *Sharia* norms allowing marriages of female minors aged 9 to 11.⁶

⁴ D. Bairamova, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti kluba imeni Ali Bairamov", August 10, 1972. ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d 6, ll. 2-4.

⁵ *Polnyi svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, ed. A. A. Dobrovol'skii, 16 vols. (Saint -Petersburg: Zakonovedenie, 1911), 2: 757.

⁶ *Khidaia, kommentarii musul'manskogo prava*, 2: 156-160.

The new Civil Code also declared that only those marriages registered at civil offices, ZAGS,⁷ would be regarded as legitimate, although it did recognize all the religious marriages arranged before 1920.⁸ The Soviet Code demanded that marriage seekers provide two official notes at the ZAGS. The first official document was a doctor's medical resolution that confirmed the appropriate ages of the marriage seekers. The second document was a legal document, signed by a lawyer, confirming that the marriage pursuers were not in any existing marriage. Aiming to end the Islamic practice of male-initiated marriage annulment, the new Civil Code allowed women to demand a divorce through a court proceeding.⁹ The new regulations also defended divorced, unemployed women, obliging the former male spouses to pay their wives alimony for three years and to support their children until the age of 18.¹⁰

In 1926, to defend those rights, the Soviet government introduced a Criminal Code that qualified polygyny, child marriage, bride-money, and marriage by coercion as criminal acts. In December 1928, the Criminal Code introduced fines and imprisonment from three to ten years for those who exercised old matrimonial traditions that violated the Soviet regulations.¹¹ Soviet law stressed that women and men were equal in all aspects of social and political lives, making, however, some exemptions for women, granting them twenty-six months of maternity leave and

⁷ ZAGS, an acronym formed from the initial letters of the Russian term - Zapisi Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoiania. In English - The Bureau of Acts of Civil Status.

⁸ "Osnovnye momenty novogo kodeksa o brake, sem'e i ob aktakh Grazhdanskogo sostoianiia" ARDA f. 379, o.6, d. 74, ll. 5-7; E. Zakhar'ian, "Brachnoe i semeinoe pravo na Vostoke," *Kommunistka*, no. 3 (February-March 1926): 42-45.

⁹ "Osnovnye momenty novogo kodeksa o brake, sem'e i ob aktakh Grazhdanskogo sostoianiia," ARDA f. 379, o.6, d. 74, ll. 5-7.

¹⁰ "Osnovnye momenty novogo kodeksa o brake, sem'e i ob aktakh Grazhdanskogo sostoianiia," ARDA f. 379, o.6, d. 74, ll. 8-9.

¹¹ "Osnovnye momenty novogo kodeksa o brake, sem'e i ob aktakh Grazhdanskogo sostoianiia," ARDA f. 379, o.6, d. 74, ll. 9-10; N. Tagieva, "Rezoliutsia po protokolu tov. Shigaieva o zakonodatel'stve po perezhitkam rodovogo byta," (15 January 1928) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, l. 18.

three to five working days of menstrual leave per month, and limiting female labor in heavy industry.¹²

As the Party and the Soviet government considered the new laws to be an important tool for the upcoming cultural revolution, the state implemented aggressive measures to reinforce them in the Muslim patriarchal society. *Zhenotdel* became the main means by which the Party and state imposed the new legislative principles. In 1922 alone, the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* introduced twenty-three instructors who explained the advantages of the new legal and women's rights in the family and work force. By 1924, their number grew to forty, and they ran nine legal aid bureaus that moved across the republic to educate people in the regions.¹³

In 1923, the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan Republic [TsIK AzSSR] founded the Azerbaijani Committee for Improving Working Women's Life, *Azkomtruzhenits*, and tasked it with the integration of "culturally backward women," particularly in the urban areas.¹⁴ That agency, under the leadership of G. Kadyrbekova, had representatives from various Commissariats: Enlightenment, Health, Finance, and Justice. It supervised the implementation of the Party program on female emancipation through those bodies.¹⁵ *Azkomtruzhenits* monitored female unemployment, coordinated the work of the shelters for homeless women and prostitutes, provided work for those in need, and advocated for sending Muslim girls to public educational schools and using general health centers instead of attending religious schools and traditional healers.¹⁶ Three years later, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union [TsIK SSSR] established the

¹² *Istoria gosudarstva i prava v Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR, 1920–1934* (Baku: AzGiz, 1973), 335–337.

¹³ Ishkova, "Otchet ot dela po rabote sredi zhenshchin TsK AzKPb, ianvar' 1923-dekabr' 1924," (March 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 345, l. 20.

¹⁴ S. Liubimova "Ob ocherednykh zadachakh KUTB," (15 January 1928) GARF f. 3316, op. 50, d. 18, ll. 12–14.

¹⁵ "Otchet o deiatel'nosti Azkomtruzhenits s 1 oktiabria 1927 po 1 ianvaria 1928," (May 1929), GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, l. 11.

¹⁶ Sultanova, *Schastlivye zhenchshiny sovetskogo Azerbaidzhana*, 91.

Committee for Improvement of Labor and Life of Women, KUTB.¹⁷ In Azerbaijan, both committees played an important role in women's integration into modern society through the abolition of the patriarchal order.¹⁸

KUTB and *Azkomtruzhenits* oversaw the implementation of the state and Party programs for the popularization of the new matrimonial law and punishment of those who violated it. The legitimacy of pre-Soviet marriages along with those registered at the Soviet civil offices produced confusion. Kadyrbekova revealed, providing the records of numerous cases, that Muslim men married second wives by civil registration while continuing to live with first wives from pre-Soviet religious marriages.¹⁹ The agencies also recorded the number of abandoned women and the difficulties they later faced in entering another marriage because they did not officially terminate their pre-Soviet religious marriage. *Zhenotdel's* workers also voiced another problem facing Muslim women: the struggle to obtain Islamic alimony, *mahr*,²⁰ from men who refused to pay it on the basis that *mahr* was no longer legal. Kadyrbekova and Ishkova presented evidence that many Muslim men also refused to pay the Soviet court-ordered alimony to a spouse – claiming that they did not recognize its authority either.²¹

KUTB and *Azkomtruzhenits* also revealed that many male Party and state bureaucrats had abandoned their “unenlightened” Muslim wives: they had affairs with the so-called *sovbaryshni*,

¹⁷ KUTB, 1926–32. In 1930, it gained the new name the *Committee to Improve the Labour and Life of Women Workers and Peasants*. “Dokladnaia zapiska” (23 May– 31 December 1931) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 221, ll. 3–4.

¹⁸ G. Kadyrbekova, “Otchet o deiatel'nosti Azkomtruzhenits pri AzTSIK,” (1 October 1926–1 October 1927) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 21–25.

¹⁹ G. Kadyrbekova, “Protokol tov. Shigaieva o zakonodatel'stve po perezhitkam rodovogo byta,” (15 January 1928) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, l. 13; B. Gasym-zade, “Tret'e zasedanie soveshchania azerbaidzhanskikh rabotnits i krest'ianok,” (29 September 1929) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 231, ll. 1–2.

²⁰ *Mahr*: an amount of money prescribed to be paid to divorced women by husbands in accordance with Sharia regulations. *Mahr* was abolished by Soviet law and replaced by its civil form, alimony.

²¹ G. Kadyrbekova, “Otchet o deiatel'nosti Azkomtruzhenits pri AzTSIK,” (1 October 1926–1 October 1927) GARF f. 6983, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 14–16; Ishkova “Stenogramma plenuma komissii KUTB zhenshchin kul'turno otstalykh narodnostei” (19 December 1928), f. 6983, op. 1, d. 5. ll. 73, 93.

female clerks of non-Muslim origin. The *Zhenotdel* officials complained that those men refusing to support their previous families, even by court order, set negative examples for rank-and-file Communists.²² Therefore, during the first years of the coexistence of Soviet and religious matrimonial principles, KUTB and *Azkomtruzhenits* primarily worked on solving the problems provoked by “unenlightened” men who abused both matrimonial norms for their benefit and put Muslim women and their children in a vulnerable position.²³ The State Archive of the Azerbaijan Republic, ARDA, has several files, *del*, each of 500–700 pages-long, that contain recorded complaints from Azeri women seeking to defend their rights and the well-being of their children from abusive men. This documents demonstrate that women enthusiastically went to that agency to obtain justice and what is more important, they received the support in settling the interfamilial issues.²⁴

The Azeri gender reformers argued that these problems came from women’s limited understanding of their rights and their adherence to customs and religious norms, that in turn, were an outcome of the insufficient work among Muslim women. Thus, the *Zhenotdel* activists popularized new laws through individual and public meetings, through print media, and amid the introduction of mobile legal aid corners at clubs and community centers, and at cooperative craft stores and cooperative stores.²⁵ To develop Muslim women’s economic independence, and to expand the boundaries of their everyday life, the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel* also organized, under Moscow’s supervision, craftsmen’s cooperative workshops, *artel*’, and cooperative stores that sold

²² Kharenko, “Svedeniia o rabote *Zhenotdela* fabrichno-zavodskogo raikoma Bakinskoi organizatsii AzKPb,” (1 January 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 345, l. 10.

²³ “Materialy o razreshenii bytovykh konfliktov (podpiski i perepiska),” (January 2, 1927–September 17, 1927) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 43, ll. 1–500.

²⁴ “Materialy o razreshenii bytovykh konfliktov (podpiski i perepiska),” (January 2, 1927–September 17, 1927) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, dd. 4, 8, 9, 15, 43.

²⁵ “Protokoly, plany, instruktsii dlia Azkomtruzhenits,” (November 2, 1927–September 23, 1928) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 31, l.7.

goods produced only by Azeri female artisans exclusively to women at prices lower than at the regular stores owned by male traders.

In 1921, there were twenty-one women's *artel's* across the republic: eleven in Baku and ten in other regions where nearly four thousand Muslim women worked.²⁶ By 1931, the number of *artel's* decreased to thirteen because many Azeri women found employment at the gender-mixed industrial or civil centers. The largest *artel'* in the republic was *Gadin Zakhmati, Women's Labor*, located in Baku city. This center had 960 Azeri female members. The other twelve *artel's* provided employment for 836 Azeri women in the republican regions.²⁷ This difference in the number of employees in those gender segregated *artel's* can be explained by the long-established culture of veiling and gender segregation in Baku and its modest existence in the regions.

Artel's and the cooperative stores were women-only businesses and ideal spaces for propaganda purposes, not only for socialist ideology and women's rights, but also for everyday issues: modern child-raising, health care, and education.²⁸ Unlike clubs, which also maintained gender segregation, these stores and *artel's* received indisputable approval and support from the centre. *Artel's*, in accordance with Marxist theory, would provide the basis for complete gender equality as the path to women's liberation through "employment outside the home and the conversion of private, unpaid work performed within the household to work performed in the socialized sector and paid by public funds".²⁹ Another important mission of the male-free clubs,

²⁶ Halle, *Women in the Soviet East*, 144–145; "Protokol zasedaniia komissi po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostoka," (30 April 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 94, l. 35.

²⁷ "Spisok zhenskikh artelei. Protokoly zasedanii Presidiuma Azkomtruzhenits," (January 26, 1931–June 11, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 235, l. 5.

²⁸ Artiukhina, "Ob ocherednykh zadachakh KUTB," (No date) GARF f. 3316, op. 50. d. 18. ll. 34–36; V. Kasparov, "Zadachi partii v oblasti raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei," *Kommunistka*, no. 7 (June–July 1925): 86–92.

²⁹ Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 42; Tseitlin, in "Protokol zasedania komissi po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostoka," stated that complete female emancipation would be achieved through women's economic independence. (30 April 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 94, ll. 11–13.

artel's, and stores was to convey to women the message that under the new law, they became equal to men in every aspect of social life. This idea was the cornerstone of Soviet-style modernization, which required the abolition of patriarchal and religious customs and had to ensure the freedom to participate in economic life.³⁰

Artel's also became a legitimate means of survival for Azeri women from former aristocratic and rich families. Working at *artel'* gave them an opportunity to support their families while their male relatives, considered “alien elements,” were not allowed to work at any Soviet office or industry or to serve in the military. The official propaganda emphasized that Soviet power culturally improved those old-regime Azeri women through the jobs provided at *artel's*. *Zhenotdel* functionaries believed that while those women worked at *artel'* they would end their unproductive existence and acknowledge Communist values.³¹ One example was the carpet weaving *artel'* called *Gadin Zakhmati, Woman's Labor*. The *artel's* records indicate that the majority of its members were women of formerly high social status and were skilled in carpet weaving, sewing, and embroidery, proficiencies obtained at the old Imperial traditional and public educational centers. These skills helped them to find a job and support their families during the time of turbulent societal transformation that left many well-off families and individuals outside Soviet life.

In the early 1920s, to popularize Soviet laws, All-Russian Communist Party officials introduced the institution of an elected female representative, *delegatka*. This female deputy from a work place, neighborhood, or village was required to attend a conference for women at the *Zhenotdel* or Communist Party meetings, and in return, had to explain Communist values in her

³⁰ “Ocherednye zadachi Zhenotdela Zakraikoma k III Zakavkazskomu parts'ezdu po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostoka,” (February–December 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 135, ll. 114–117.

³¹ “Postanovleniia Zakkraikoma VKPb i AzTSIK o sostoianii raboty sredi zhenshchin,” (June 18, 1927–March 1, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 16, ll. 50–51.

community.³² In Azerbaijan the *delegatka* program became known as the *vakila* program and was one of the Party's effective strategies for bringing Azeri women into public life.³³ This program allowed selected Muslim women from small towns and remote villages to gain knowledge about Soviet female rights by being fully financially sponsored during their stay at a larger centre for several weeks. Usually, *vakila* was a woman who had societal recognition in her community and very rarely a Communist Party member. The number of Azeri native representatives, *vakila*, was 2,356 out of 6,070 among all female representatives in Azerbaijan.³⁴ *Vakila* became vital to the regime to promote Soviet gender values for the benefit of women, families, and society. Kadyrbekova stated that the institution of *vakila* significantly helped Soviet leaders to promote laws that defended the new women's rights and to attract the Muslim population, who feared forcible indoctrination.³⁵

The process of introducing Soviet legal norms in the Azeri community aroused many problems that hindered that process. Ismailova, the head of the *Zhenotdel* regional branch, claimed that the centre did not understand local realities as the result of the irregular work of the centre functionaries in remote regions and a lack of communication between peripheral branches and the headquarters.³⁶ Another *Zhenotdel* worker, Rasul-zade, claimed that unfamiliarity with Islamic

³² R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930*. 336 - 350. Stites claims that the system of "delegate meetings" established by *Zhenotdel* in Russia was designed as an institution for women's liberation and political indoctrination. *Delegatka* was a worker woman assigned to the *Zhenotdel* for a period of three to six months. After her apprenticeship *delegatka* would be appointed as an observer at a factory, school, hospital, village soviet, and trade union to report to *Zhenotdel* about the positive and negative aspects of the implementation of Soviet laws. Stites argues that *delegatka* was a threat to male bureaucrats, drunkards, and camouflaged rich merchants, large landlords, and other "alien elements."

³³ "Telegrammy TsK AKPb uiezdnykh komitetam partii o komandirovanii zhenshchin-azerbaidzhanok na instruktorskiye kursy Zhenotdela. Ob orhanizatsii i provedenii "Nedeli Truzhenitsy" i drugoe," (June 23, 1921–August 22, 1921) ARDA f. 411, o. 1, d. 44, l. 19.

³⁴ "Statisticheskie svedeniia o sniavshikh chadru, o bytovykh prestupleniakh, o vovlechenii zhenshchin v uchebu i rabotu," (September 27, 1928–September 19, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 74, l. 35.

³⁵ "Ustavy AzTSIK o deiatel'nosti delegatok," (February 17, 1925–September 5, 1928) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 5, ll. 5–13.

³⁶ Izmailova, "Stenographicheskii otchet II vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniia rabotnikov zhenklubov, ugol'kov i krasnykh iurt na Vostoke," (12 March 1930) GARF f. 6983, op. 1. d. 4, l. 34.

norms among the central agents produced confusion: the centre often obliged men and non-Muslim female workers to work among secluded Muslim women, thus feeding speculation that the *Zhenotdel* was not a place for decent Muslim women.³⁷ In March 1923, in the rural Kazakh region, these speculations surged when *Zhenotdel* activist Vetrova, a Russian-born woman, organized an anti-prostitution campaign attracting to the club local courtesans of non-Muslim background in the regional *Zhenotdel*. That event prevented many Azeri Muslims from joining the *Zhenotdel* women's club. Along with this, Rasul-zade reported that some of the *Zhenotdel* regional female activists had the reputation of being immoral within their home societies, and that locals wanting to keep them far from their communities sent them to the centre as *vakila*.³⁸

In addition, some local female *Zhenotdel* functionaries behaved in a despotic manner, ruining the reputation of the agency. One of them, in the Lenkoran region, physically abused her female subordinates and bribed them into silence with extra food rations.³⁹ The *Zhenotdel* activists acknowledged that such abusive and poorly educated employees undermined gender reforms for Muslim women's empowerment. Baberowski claims that all these problems in *Zhenotdel's* performance came from fact that Azeri native female gender reformers were absolutely illiterate women. He states that among Azeri *Zhenotdel* members, only A. Sultanova and N. Efendiieva were literate individuals who could understand and convey the message of Communist gender discourse to the broad masses and that this factor impacted the course of the reforms.⁴⁰

³⁷ Rasul-zade, "Protocol soveshchaniia zavzhenotdelami Azerbaidzhana," (3 July 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 344, ll. 38–39.

³⁸ Rasul-zade, "Protocol soveshchaniia zavzhenotdelami Azerbaidzhana," (3 July 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 344, l. 35; Ishkova, "Protocol soveshchaniia zavzhenotdelami Azerbaidzhana," (3 July 1923) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 344, ll. 71, 131.

³⁹ Babaian, "Chetvertoe zasedanie respublikanskogo soveshchaniia zaveduiushchikh otdelov rabotnits i kret'ianok," (30 September 1929). GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 232, l. 5.

⁴⁰ Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde*, 449–450.

Azeri gender reformers, like their central Moscow-based *Zhenotdel* colleagues, blamed patriarchal traditions but not ideological and administrative mistakes for the interruption of reforms. In 1928 they declared that veiling and seclusion were the main obstacles on the road to the emancipation of Muslim women. One of the main barriers to women's emancipation, in the understanding of both the local and central *Zhenotdel*, was the veil as a fundamental issue and symbol of female societal isolation. In Azerbaijan, veiling was culturally specific among urban communities, especially Baku and Lenkoran, the longstanding *Shia* spiritual centers. Urban Azeri Muslim women, unlike those in village areas, wore a face and body-covering veil, *chadra*.⁴¹ As discussed elsewhere, long before the Soviet unveiling campaign, the issue of face-covering was a focus of public debates in Azerbaijan. This subject had its advocates, who argued against religious fanaticism and for the end of veiling and women's segregation. Until 1928, the process of unveiling in Azerbaijan was voluntary and not regulated by the state. Those women who were unveiled before the Party call of 1928 were members of progressive families, graduates of the public schools, or spouses and sisters of leading Communists.

From the first years of Bolshevik rule, Moscow-based government officials called for the gradual removal of veiling and the end of women's isolation all over the Soviet Union, assigning this task to the *Zhenotdel* exclusively. The central resolutions for unveiling demanded graduality and carefulness not to deter Muslims from Soviet power. However, high-ranked Azerbaijani Communists and the editors of the journal *Sharg Gadini* were in opposition to this tactic and initiated the campaign that went ahead of the Moscow directives arguing for the introduction of certain laws and deadlines to abolish veiling and criticizing those who considered this task to be

⁴¹ *Azerbaijan Etnoqrafiyası*. 3 vols. (ŞƏRQ-QƏRB: Baku, 2007), on different headcover styles, 2:130. On *chadra*, *ibid.* 2:136.

only the work of the *Zhenotdel*.⁴² Pre-revolution intellectuals and politicians who welcomed Communist power argued that women's liberation could not be achieved if the veil remained in society. M. Guliyev, A. Sultanova, G. Kadyrbekova, A. Karaev, D. Bairamova, Kh. Shabanova-Karaeva, G. Musabekov, N. Narimanov, Agamali-ogli, and other high-ranked Azeri politicians stated that veiling was the major symbolic antithesis to modernity. Thus, they demanded that Moscow introduce government measures for immediate *chadra* abolition as part of the Party's strategy for drawing women into the public sphere.

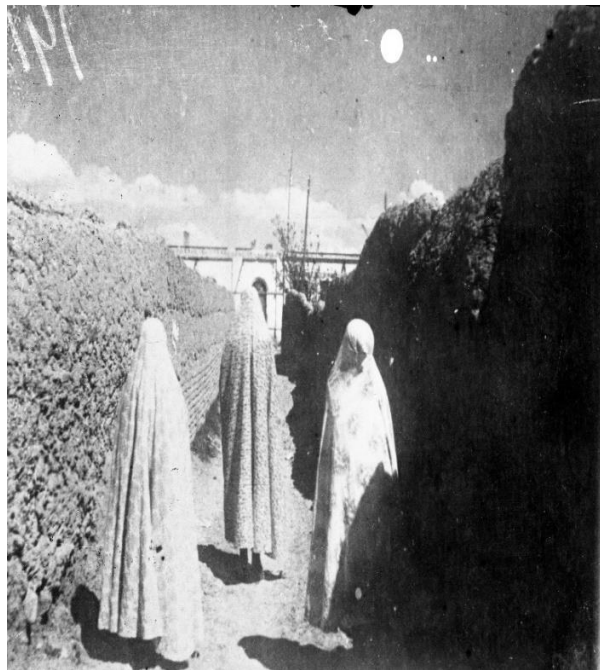
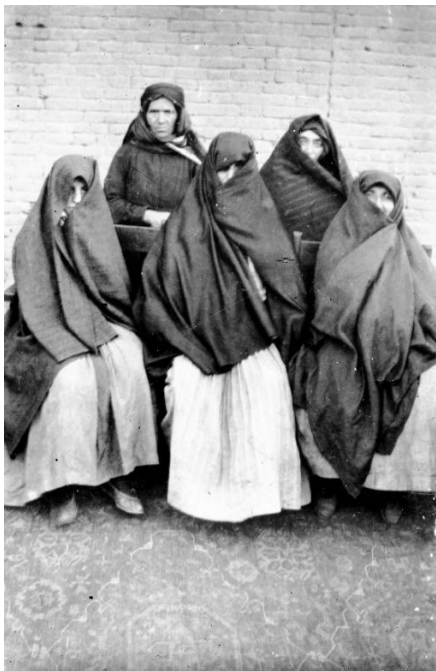


Figure 29. Azeri women in *chadra*, Baku. AAKFD photo.

In Azerbaijan, the very first official resolution that claimed to end veiling as a top state priority came to life on February 8, 1921. In that resolution, the members of the First Congress of Azerbaijani Women decided to begin the campaign against veiling on International Women's Day,

⁴² "Tsirkuliar TsIK AzSSR ob usilenii raboty sredi zhenshchin," (December 31, 1927–May 27, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 18, ll. 6–10.

March 8, 1921.⁴³ This resolution paved the way for state-regulated mass unveiling in Azerbaijan. On March 8, 1921, Azeri Communist Party leaders and *Zhenotdel* activists organized processions in Baku to march from various quarters of the old city, *Ichari Shekher*, *Inner City*, and industrial settlement *Gara Shekher*, *Black City*, to unite at Lenin Square. During this public demonstration, they gave speeches that promoted equal rights and unveiling as signs of women's devotion to Soviet-style modernity.

In 1921 and after, *Zhenotdel* officials also held public unveiling ceremonies in several factory shops in Baku industrial quarters and officially praised the newly unveiled women.⁴⁴ In 1928, Azerbaijani Party leaders and functionaries from the Commissariats of Justice and Enlightenment, and those close to the *Zhenotdel* agency and its journal *Sharg Gadini*, observing the slowness of the process of *chadra* removal, argued that this lethargy was an outcome of the absence of an indisputable state edict to ban veiling. They claimed that the lack of a government ruling also allowed proponents of patriarchal practices to argue that the state itself did not oppose veiling. Hence, to immediately end veiling and seclusion, the Azeri reformers for Muslim women's liberation demanded that Moscow release an official decree to strengthen and accelerate gender reforms. The debate also intensified in 1928, after Azeri reformers compared the pace of *chadra* elimination reforms in Azerbaijan to the state-promoted unveiling campaign in Turkey. Ishkova, the leader of Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*, noted that "The government-sponsored movement in Turkey to ban *fez*, *yashmak*, and to liquidate *harems* heavily influenced the native Party members and now, they demand a decree on *chadra* elimination."⁴⁵

⁴³ D. Bairamova, "Doklad o deiatel'nosti kluba imeni Ali Bairamov," (August 10, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d 6, l. 4.

⁴⁴ "Tsirkuliar TsIK AzSSR ob usilenii raboty sredi zhenshchin," (December 31, 1927–May 27, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 18, ll. 13–18.

⁴⁵ *Fez*: Turkish male headdress; *Yashmak*: a Turkic type of veil that leaves the upper part of the face uncovered. *Harem*: the separate part of a Muslim household reserved for wives and female servants.

The Azeri reformers also insisted on rapid societal modernization through unveiling because they considered Azerbaijan to be the role model state for the entire Muslim world. They referred to King Amanullah of Afghanistan who, in his mission to modernize a tribal society, looked for various models of modernization by travelling to Europe, Turkey, and the Soviet Union, particularly Azerbaijan. In 1928, highly ranked Azeri Communists, such as A. Karaev, G. Musabekov, Agamali-ogli, and A. Sultanova, supervised the king during his tour across the republic to demonstrate those cultural triumphs realized under socialism. In particular, they glorified the achievements of the establishment of modern public education, Muslim women's liberation, and the abolition of religious norms and traditional customs.⁴⁶

In 1928, motivated by the perceived leading position among the Muslim nations, the leaders of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan abandoned its gradualism in Muslim women's emancipation drive and adopted a new socio-political program that attacked the old ways of living. This cultural revolution aimed to emancipate Muslim women rapidly. Throughout 1928 and 1929, the Azerbaijani Communist Party and *Zhenotdel* activists dedicated many meetings at the *Zhenotdel* offices, at the Muslim Women's Clubs, and at the general meetings at industrial shops to discussing the need for a legal act against *chadra*. Azeri Communists, such as Agamali-ogli, Kh. Shabanova-Karaeva, M. Guliyev, A. Karaev, G. Musabekov, A. Sultanova, and G. Kadyrbekova, and intellectuals, such as Sh. Efendiieva and Dzh. Mamedkulizade, organized *Komissiiia po Sniatiiu Chadri, The Committee for Chadra Abolition*. The members of that

Ishkova, "Nuzhno li izdat' dekret zapreshchaiuschii noshenie chadry," *Kommunistka*, no. 8 (July–August 1928): 79; Aina Sultanova, "Mestnye rabotniki ob izdanie dekreta," *Kommunistka*, no. 1 (1929): 33–34; S.B., "Yashmak," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 11 (November 1928): 9–10.; Kh. Khuseinov, "Chadrani jashak etmek dekret verilmelimi," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (September–October 1928): 3–5.

⁴⁶ The newspaper *Kommunist* illustrated the visit of the Afghan king to Azerbaijan under the title *Haberlar*, News. *Kommunist's* everyday issues, May 1928. L. B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernise a Tribal Society* (Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press, 1973).

Committee called in unison for an attack on the old traditions and their supporters.⁴⁷ When those officials gave speeches in Russian, they used the term *Nastuplenie*, *Attack*, echoing their Russian colleagues who presented themselves as soldiers on the social and political battlefield to fight remnants of the old regime. When they promoted the new program in Azeri language, they used *hujum*, which is translated as an attack. Both terms fitted ideally within the Party's militarized vocabulary to combat patriarchal practices.⁴⁸

However, in Azerbaijan, unlike in Uzbekistan, the term *hujum* did not become a slogan to describe the campaign for cultural transformation of the late 1920s to liquidate the visual symbols of cultural backwardness. Azeri Soviet reformers, aiming to attack remnants of the old life, did not use *Attack* or *Hujum* to express the Communist Party's drive to transform Muslim society. To define Azeri Party-led reform for prompt *chadra* abolition, Committee members employed a relatively non-aggressive slogan — *Redd Olsun Chadra*, *Chadra Go Away*. From 1928, the *Redd Olsun Chadra* campaign became the dominant symbol of Soviet modernization for cultural transformation in Azerbaijan and an important part of the state-building process.

Starting in 1928, Azeri proponents of the state decree to ban *chadra* organized the campaign and supported their arguments against veiling in the journal *Sharg Gadini*, providing information about women who abandoned the veil and advanced in socialist society.⁴⁹ The government also employed Azeri writers and poets to proclaim the urgent need to remove *chadra* from society, issuing a great number of books and pamphlets titled, like the movement itself, *Redd Olsun Chadra*. In plain language, the Azeri authors N. Rafibeili, A. Dzhavad, H. Sanili, Dzh.

⁴⁷ "Tsirkuliar TsIK AzSSR ob usilenii raboty sredi zhenshchin," (December 31, 1927–May 27, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 18, l. 13.

⁴⁸ "Protokoly zasedaniia Komissii po Sniatiuu chadry," (March 28, 1929–December 2, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 2, ll. 14–18.

⁴⁹ "Rett olsun chadra shuari heiata kecherilir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 20–22; "Rett olsun chadra kompaniiasi netecelerinden jeqynlar," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 23–24.

Dzhabbarli, and others, emphasized the role of unveiling in building a modern and egalitarian society in their poems, plays, and novels.⁵⁰

Women activists across republic organized mass unveiling meetings, gave speeches demanding a government ruling to outlaw veiling, and gathered signatures on petitions for a decree. According to Party records, between January and April of 1929, the *Zhenotdel* held thirty-four meetings in Baku alone, where 2113 women unveiled. During the same period, there were 148 meetings in the regions that organized the unveiling of 1104 Azeri women. The records also state that all women who participated in those meetings demanded an official decree on *chadra* abolition to protect them from public harassment and from those male family members who opposed unveiling of their wives and daughters.⁵¹

In addition, praising the imposition of fines on *Shia* religious rituals, which by 1928 brought an end to their practice, Azeri officials from the Commissariats of Justice and Enlightenment began to demand the imposition 300 *rubles* fine for appearing in public places in *chadra*, and their total confiscation.⁵² To promote *chadra* abolition the Azeri government introduced a policy to reimburse a confiscated veil with a gift of fabric enough to make a dress or coat. The reasons behind this policy were the widespread complaints from many impoverished Muslim women who stated that they would eagerly unveil, but that being deprived of a decent dress or coat, they needed *chadra* to cover their exposed bodies under their poor clothes. To support this policy, Moscow sent two train compartments of European-style coats to reimburse women for the rejecting to wear their *chadras*. Also, Azeri *Zhenotdel* officials allocated 5,000

⁵⁰ Nigar Rafibeili, *Chadra*, 4–5 *Dan Ulduzu*, 1928; *Redd Olsun Chadra* (The collection of novels and poems that condemned *chadra*) (Azerneshr, 1930); H. Sanili, *Chadra Esirleri* (Azerneshr, 1929); A. Dzhavad, *At bu Chadrani* (Azerneshr, 1930); A. Dzhavad, *Arvadimdan Shikaet* (Azerneshr, 1929); A. Dzhavad, *Teessubkesh* (Azerneshr, 1930).

⁵¹ “Svodki Az soiuzov ob itogakh provedenia kompanii po sniatiiu chadry,” (February 18, 1929–April 3, 1929) ARDA f. 1114, o. 2, d. 2481, ll. 4–6.

⁵² K. Ishkova, “Nujno li izdat’ dekret, zapreshchaiushchii noshenie chadry,” *Kommunistka*, no. 11 (November 1928): 59–60.

rubles to repay the cost of *chadra* instead of a piece of fabric for all recently unveiled women in need.⁵³ Overall, between March and July 1929, the Azerbaijani *Committee for Chadra Abolition* received from Moscow and the Azeri Party administration 2241,425 meters of fabric, which cost 11450,556 *rubles*, to compensate for the value of confiscated *chadra* for unveiled Muslim women.⁵⁴

Along with this, to inspire an interest in Azeri women to remove *chadra*, Azeri officials issued a directive demanding that civil and industrial managers provide jobs for recently unveiled women.⁵⁵ For example, in Baku alone, the *artel' Sanaii Shirketi, Manufacturing Company*, provided jobs for 102 Azeri women on the condition of removing their *chadra*. *Gadin Zakhmati* provided employment for twelve recently unveiled women. The official records state that between March and October of 1929, the number of newly unveiled and employed women in Baku alone was 2,003.⁵⁶

The Azeri advocates for the decree, such as Kadyrbekova, Bairamova, and Sultanova, also employed medical knowledge to claim that *chadra* and seclusion were responsible for various female ailments, from respiratory diseases to slowed fetal development during pregnancy.⁵⁷ They also argued that veil-wearing violated workplace safety rules because it could cause injury and suffocation.⁵⁸ Portraying *chadra* as a black piece of fabric, which deprived women of sunlight and

⁵³ “Protokoly zasedaniia Komissii po sniatiiu chadry,” (March 17, 1929–April 30, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. ll. 2–6.

⁵⁴ “Protokol zasedaniia Komissii po Sniatiiu chadry,” (March 28, 1929–December 2, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 2, l. 10.

⁵⁵ “Kalendarnyi plan Komissia po Sniatiiu Chadry. Svedeniia o kolichestve zhenshchin rabotaiushchikh na predpriiatiakh AzSSR,” (March 14–October 30, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 3, l. 2.

⁵⁶ “Kalendarnyi plan Komissia po Sniatiiu Chadry. Svedeniia o kolichestve zhenshchin rabotaiushchikh na predpriiatiakh AzSSR,” (March 14–October 30, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 3, ll. 10–13.

⁵⁷ “Chadradan istexsalata,” “Emekchi Turk gadini ozunu chadradan xilas edir,” “Chadranin axirinchi nefesidir,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–2 (1929): 3–7.

⁵⁸ “Chadradan istexsalata,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–2 (1929): 1–3; Markovitch, “Doklad o rabote proizvodstvennykh iacheek Bakinskoi organizatsii TsIK,” (12 October 1925) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 63, l. 27.

fresh air and thus made their bones weak and their skin unhealthy, the reformers stressed the ugly image of Azeri women wearing *chadra*: a black, shapeless sack. To boost the crusade against veiling, the reformers employed Azeri fashion designers who introduced new types of head-coverings: hats, berets, and modern head scarves. Promoting the new style head-coverings in *Sharg Gadini*, they stressed that *chadra* was backward, unfashionable, and unsuitable for a modern woman.⁵⁹

In contrast, opponents of the decree, represented mostly by the non-Muslim *Zhenotdel* and Party functionaries, K. Ishkova, V. Tseitlin, F. Shlemova, and others, found strong support from Moscow to defend their arguments. They argued that veiling would fall by itself after women had attended educational centers and enrolled in the workforce. Moreover, they stressed the increase in the divorce rate among the Muslim population, because many men divorced unveiled women and the latter were left without financial or social support. They insisted that education and job opportunities had to be the primary means of unveiling.⁶⁰ The Moscow Party's directives, sent to the local Party and *Zhenotdel* agencies, stated that issuing the decree on the abolition of face coverings would be premature and untimely. Furthermore, it would provoke resistance to Soviet reforms, referring to the cases of verbal and physical harassment of unveiled women in Baku.⁶¹

The central Moscow-based *Zhenotdel* officials argued that a decree would force Muslim women to stay home, rather than to come out into public life. Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow and one of the leaders in Soviet gender reforms and female public education, also had a negative opinion about a potential unveiling decree. In December 1928, at the All-Union Congress of the

⁵⁹ "Rett olsun chadra shuari heiata kecherilir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 20–22.

⁶⁰ Alibekova, "Stenogramma zasedaniia vsesoiuznykh kursov vostochnykh politprosvetnikov," (18 June 1929) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 237, ll. 6, 8.

⁶¹ Torskaia, Rumiantsev, "Orgsoveshchanie TsK VKPb po voprosu ob Azerbaidzhanskoi partiinoi organizatsii," (16 July 1929) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 410, ll. 231–233; 252–254.

Toiling Women of the East, she criticized even discussion of the decree, declaring that the oriental masses were not prepared for radical veil eradication yet.⁶² However, the Azeri reformers understood it not as a rejection of the introduction of the decree, but as its postponement, needed to increase propaganda work among Azeri Muslims.

The Azeri government and Party executives intensified their campaign to end the patriarchal traditions by claiming that *madrassahs* and mosques became the major rivals for Soviet gender reforms in the republic. After the Bolsheviks' empowerment in Azerbaijan, the priesthood was in open opposition to the new regime. *Mullahs*, in their struggle to preserve religious norms of living, turned their attention to Muslim women, calling them the only societal group that would be able to retain traditions and religion.⁶³ To attain support, many clerics proclaimed that the Koran did not require veiling and seclusion. Moreover, moderate reformist clerics challenged the canonical interpretation of mosques as male-dominated places by allowing women to pray there and even become ministers.⁶⁴ The Soviet authorities declared that these reformist *mullahs* launched the reformation of women's positions in Islam as a counterweight to Soviet gender policy in order to retain control over the commoners and even the Communists.⁶⁵

It was true that even some Azerbaijani gender reformers continued to debate veiling and women's seclusion in the framework of pre-revolution criticism against the abuses of Islamic covenants by the conservative *mullahs*, rather than against religion as a whole. From the first years

⁶² N. Krupskaiia, "Rech' na vsesoiuznom soveshchsnii rabotnits sredi zhenshchin Vostoka," (December 10, 1928), *Kommunistka*, no. 12 (1928): 10–12.

⁶³ Ismail Suleiman, "Gadinlarin esas roludur," *Asri Musul'manlig* (15 June 1925): 5; Bilal Faik, "Cirkin khususi khaginda," *Asri Musul'manlig* (May 1925): 4; Adzhi Mudzhaheddin, "Islam ve akhlagizlik," *Asri Musul'manlig* (May 1925): 4; Protokoly, "Materialy iz svodki otdela OGPU #12 "Dukhovenstvo (sovershenno sekretno)," RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 23.

⁶⁴ Bizim mullahs va Gadinlar, *Kommunist* (July 27): 1928; Nukhrat, "Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi 'O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'manok (sovershenno sekretno)," (Top secret, 2 March 1925) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 24.

⁶⁵ Nukhrat, "Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi 'O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'manok (sovershenno sekretno)" (Top secret, 9 October 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 6.

of Bolshevik power in Azerbaijan, Ishkova, a leader of the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*, complained that many female activists in the department remained devoted Muslims. She referred to the case of *Zhenotdel's* executive officer from the Sal'iany region, who argued that religion could not be eliminated from women's everyday lives and continued to practice religious rituals at her branch, in this way making the club popular among local people.⁶⁶ The central *Zhenotdel* also criticized the regional director of the *Zhenotdel* branch in Shamkir, Gadzhieva, who claimed that Islam means Communism and that the Koran should be studied in a new way, free from the influence of the corrupt clergy.⁶⁷ Despite this official disapproval of Gadzhieva's methods of promoting Soviet-style gender reforms, the archival documents demonstrate that she was able to improve women's position in one patriarchal community.

Gadzhieva collaborated with the Islamic priests and was able to convince them to perform weddings for those who also desired to have a religious ceremony but only after civil registration at ZAGS and only after *Zhenotdel* approval. Also, Gadzhieva insisted that a man who wanted to take a second wife must support his claim with medical records of his first wife's chronic illness, and only after this he would be allowed to enter into a polygamist marital union. Along with this, she issued the directive that decreased the *makhr* price from 30.000 *rubles* to 5.000, in this way allowing young men who were not rich to marry young women, and *mullahs* agreed with this as well. Baberowski, citing the same archival document in order to stress his main argument about the alien and repressive character of the *Zhenotdel*-promoted gender reforms, manipulated this record, omitting the requirement for the medical report, the existence of the *makhr* – 30.000 rubles, and the simultaneity of religious and civil marriages. He states that Gadzhieva asked a *mullah* who

⁶⁶ Ishkova, "Otchet po rabote Zhenotdela TsK AzKPb za ianvar' - iiul' 1923," (No date) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 344, l. 70; V. Tseitlin, "O nashei rabote," (1922) RGASPI f. 64, o. 1, d. 217, ll. 129–130.

⁶⁷ Gadzhieva, "Tret'e zasedanie Kraevogo soveshchaniia zaveduiushchikh Zhenotdelami Kavkazskikh respublik," (October 4, 1921) RGASPI f. 64, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 144–146.

wanted to take the second wife to pay 5.000 rubles to the *Zhenotdel* cashbox for self-serving purposes. The *mullah* refused, saying that it was awfully expensive.⁶⁸ However, this document shows that Gadzhieva understanding that the religious practices and customs still were upheld by the many Azeris tried to control the process and helped those women and men who could not afford the expensive *mahr*.

The *Kommunist* newspaper records demonstrate that between 1926 and 1928, many Azeri women continued to perform religious ceremonies despite the state-run campaign against *Shia* practices. The newspaper editors provided records of the *Allakhsizlig*, *Godless*, society's meetings which criticized those women who followed the *mullahs* and participated at the *Ashura* ceremonies.⁶⁹ To estrange women and men from those Islamic practices, the authors appealed to women as a caregiver of their sons and husbands who had to explain their men the lack of hygiene norms during the self-whipping process along with the harmful consequences of religious fasting for women's bodies.⁷⁰ The periodicals of that period also illustrate that the reformist Muslim clergy became influential competitors to the Soviet reformers by abandoning their disputes about the righteousness of the *Shia* and *Sunni* denominations of Islam to unite in their struggle against the Soviet rule.⁷¹ Along with this, the editors of the *Kommunist* newspaper stated that to preserve their influence and to be strong competitors in ideological discussions, the *mullahs* had begun to study not only science and Western philosophy, but also Marxism.⁷²

⁶⁸ Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde*, 451.

⁶⁹ On *Ashura* rituals see the work of the Finnish orientalist Ivar Lassy, who in 1915–1916 visited Baku and its surroundings to observe this religious ceremony. I. Lassy, *The Moharram Mysteries among the Azerbaijan Turks of Caucasia: an Academical Dissertation* (University of California Libraries (January, 1916). *Ashura* ceremonies required from men to perform the acts of public self-flagellation to commemorate the death of late Imam Hussein — a *Shia* martyr and a saint.

⁷⁰ "Allakhsizlig Gadyklar," *Kommunist*, June 28, 1926; "Gadinlar, Medeniiat, va Din," *Kommunist*, May 27, 1927.

⁷¹ "Medeniiat Inglabi va Gadinlar," *Kommunist*, July 20, 1928.

⁷² "Medeniiat Inglabi va Gadinlar," *Kommunist*, July 20, 1928.

Remarkably, the rhetoric about the modernization of Islamic practices and the role of religion in the life of the Azeri community was not limited only to discussion within the paradigm of gender reformation. Nariman Narimanov, high-ranked Communist leader, writer, and former doctor at the *Tagiev School*, argued that religion played an important role in the life of the whole Azeri community. To introduce the advantages of Bolshevik rule in Azerbaijan, Narimanov compared Communist ideals with Islamic doctrines. In his writing and speeches, which he often performed at mosques across the republic, he declared that Karl Marx acted like the Prophet Mohammed in banning the worship to idols and gold. To liberate Muslims, he argued, there was a strong need to teach them to work in industry, to raise a proletariat, and to ostracize merchants and rich people who spoiled commoners by imposing the wrong moral values and adoring money.⁷³

Narimanov also claimed that Islam did not oppose education, but that the corrupt clergy, who aimed to control society, argued against public enlightenment. By eliminating those degraded priests, the Bolsheviks opened the doors to the true understanding of Islam: “Communism gave our priests the right to practice the religion in accordance with its genuine character.” He concluded that modernist *mullahs* should not be afraid of the Soviet power that defended freedom of spiritual expression.⁷⁴ To support his proclamations, Narimanov went against the Moscow-sent directives which commanded the end of religious practices and rituals. Between 1920 and 1923, despite the Moscow-issued ban on publicly practicing acts of self-flagellation during the month of *Ashura*, he allowed street processions and the performance of that ritual.⁷⁵

⁷³ Nariman Narimanov, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniia*, 3 vols. (Baku: Azerneshr, 1988–1989), 2: 370–371.

⁷⁴ N. Narimanov, *Stat'i i Pis'ma* (Moskva: Tsentral'noe izdatel'stvo narodov Vostoka, 1925), 14.

⁷⁵ “Shakhsei-Vakhsei”, *Kommunist*, August 7, 1925.

Called the “Lenin of the East,” Narimanov had great authority, which helped him to maintain a balance between the Bolsheviks and the broad Azeri community during the first years of societal transformation in the Azerbaijan republic. However, this dialog with Islamic spiritual leaders ceased to exist after Narimanov’s death in 1925. The Azeri Communist regime escalated the campaign against religious centres, which further led to a complete closure of Islamic spiritual places: mosques and *Shia* holy shrines.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the Azeri government and Party authorities severely undermined the position of those clerics who were involved in women’s emancipation within Islamic reformation and finally banned their activities.⁷⁷ Azeri politicians, who devoted their Communist careers to Soviet-style cultural transformation, made a connection between the ineffective process of women’s liberation and the influence of the Islamic clergy.⁷⁸

The Azeri gender reform activists, N. Tagieva and G. Mir-Kadyrova, declared that one of the main issues on the road to veil abolition and female empowerment was that even some male Communists were not truly devoted to female emancipation, and adhered to religious dogmas on gender relationships. They pointed to the fact that those Communists, while forcing other women to remove their veils, demanded that the women in their own households wear *chadra* and keep the secluded life-style.⁷⁹ G. Huseynov and Farig, leading Azeri politicians and journalists writing

⁷⁶ Dzh. Hadzhibeili, *Anti-Islamic Propaganda in Azerbaijan* (Munich, 1959), 20–24.

⁷⁷ Molotov, “Proekt rezoliutsii po dokladu ob itogakh II s’ezda soiuzza bezbozhnikov i o rabote antireligioznoi komissii TsK,” (4 August 1929) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 7, ll. 12–13.

⁷⁸ Nukhrat, ““Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi ‘O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’manok (sovershenno sekretno)’,” (Top secret, 9 October 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 5; Protokoly, “Materialy iz svodki otdela OGPU #12 “Dukhovenstvo (sovershenno sekretno)’,” (Top secret, No date) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, ll. 26–28, 32, 62; Mekhtiev and Isakov, “V komissiiu po voprosam kul’ta pri prizidiiu TsK SSSR,” (Top secret, 27 December 1936) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 1–4.

⁷⁹ S. B., “Chadra ve papax qeturulur,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 11, 1928; “Chadrasiz shura sechkilirine,” no. 11, 1928; (1928): 8–9, “1928, 12, 2–3.

in *Sharg Gadini*, denounced that many Azeri women, with permission from their male relatives to attend the clubs, continued to wear *chadras* even at the *Zhenotdel*'s meetings in Baku.⁸⁰

Therefore, Party and *Zhenotdel* officials proposed to first remove veil from the wives of Party and government functionaries and then from other women.⁸¹ Along with this, observing some resistance to the plea to remove the veil, they also called for a decree to protect unveiled and politically active women from violent attacks. They argued that the existence of the official ruling would make unveiling a universal rather than an individual act.⁸² As a result, even though a decree banning *chadra* had not yet been issued by the Moscow central authorities, the *Redd Olsun Chadra* campaign culminated in October 1928 when the Azerbaijani Commissariat of Enlightenment banned face coverings at all educational and government centres.⁸³ The Progress Records of the *Azkomtruzhenits* demonstrate that by February of 1929, just after five months after the issue of this decree, the number of unveiled women across the republic was 26,987. The document stresses that 12,305 among those unveiled were women from Baku and its surroundings.⁸⁴

Azeri Communist reformers also severely criticized Azeri male attire, especially the traditional hat: *papaq*, a high sheep fur hat worn by Muslim and Christian men throughout the North and South Caucasus. In Azerbaijan, *papaq* wearers were traditionally peasants and nomadic men. In October 1928, the discussion of *papaq* took a central place in Azeri reformers' discourse on abandoning the remnants of the old life in the countryside. To justify the reformation, Azeri

⁸⁰ T. Huseynov, "Chadrasiz 12-ci ile qedem," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 2–3; A. Fariq, "Chadrani atin," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9–10 (1928): 10–12.

⁸¹ Mir-Kadyrova, "Protokol zasedanii KUTB," (17 May 1929) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 172, l. 20.; Tagieva, "Partiitsy dolzhny pokazat' primer," *Kommunistka*, no. 7 (July 1929): 50; Osman Dzhuma-zade, "Pod znakom raskreposhchenia," *Kommunistka*, no. 7 (July 1929): 48–49.

⁸² S. Liubimova, "Dekret o chadre i obshchestvo 'Doloi kalym i mnogozhenstvo'," *Kommunistka*, no. 8 (July–August 1928): 73–78.

⁸³ "Ukaz Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniia AzSSR o sniatii chadri s rabotnits i uchashchikhsia vsekh uchebnykh zavedenii," (October 1928) ARDA f. 57, o, 1, d. 561, l. 27.

⁸⁴ "Svedeniia Azkomtruzhenits ob itogakh kompanii po sniatiiu chadry, o kolichestve artelei i zaniatykh v nikh rabotnits," (January 5, 1929–February 14, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o, 6, d. 125, ll. 2–3.

Communists employed old and modern historical facts. During one of the Party's meetings, Teimur Guseinov referred to the reforms of the Russian tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725), who modernized Russian society by forcefully introducing Western culture. Guseinov, in particular, stressed that the dress reform aimed to “civilize” Russians by removing traditional clothes first from the nobility and merchants and then from commoners. To encourage people to look like Europeans but not like Asians, the Russian tsar also imposed a tax on beards forcing Russian men to shave. In cases of misbehavior, he personally cut their beards with an axe.⁸⁵ The latter fact was especially attractive to Azeri Communists, who insisted on punitive methods to impose the new dress standards.

Another political leader, Guliyev, appealed to the success of the Turkish leader, Atatürk, who totally eliminated all Ottoman-era headdresses, also by punishing opposition to this reform. Agamali-ogli connected *papaq* to Islam. According to him, a proper Muslim man could not pray and appear in public without the headcover. Thus, if Soviet officials eliminated *papaq* they would simultaneously destroy the power of religion in Azeri society.⁸⁶ In November 1928, the Azeri Communists issued an official decree that banned village men from appearing at educational and civil centers in *papaq*. They also assigned a date, January 25 of 1929, by which male peasants had to stop wear *papaq*, exchanging it for the European-style cap or beret.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ V. Kliuchevskii, *Peter the Great: The Classic Biography of Tsar Peter the Great* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 82–85.

⁸⁶ “Postanovlenie Komissariata Prosveshcheniia AzSSR o vospreshchenii nosheniia papakhi i chadry v uchebnykh zavedeniakh i kul’turno-prosvetitel’skikh uchrezhdeniakh,” (November 15, 1928–October 28, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o, 1, d. 561, ll. 12–19.

⁸⁷ “Ukaz Komissariata Prosveshcheniia AzSSR o zapreshchenii nosheniia papakhi v obrazovatel’nykh i kul’turno-prosvetitel’skikh tsestrakh,” (November 10, 1928) ARDA f. 57, o, 1, d. 561, l. 29.



Figure 30. Azeri peasants. Two standing men are in *papakh*. Baku, 1929. AAKFD photo.

It is difficult to estimate how effective the ban on *papaq* was in reality because, unlike reports about *chadra* removal, Azeri Soviet officials did not keep any record about the number of male peasants who stopped wearing *papaq*. What is known from the official records is that the brief reform produced a significant level of opposition. The Muslim village men violently opposed stopping to wear *papaq*, considering it an act of disgrace. Many men refused to leave home to go to work at the farms or the village soviets, pointing to alleged sickness.⁸⁸ Some defended their rights with weapons. As a result, in March 1929, five months after the beginning of the anti-*papaq* campaign, the Azeri Communist authority issued a new decree that allowed male villagers to wear *papaq* in public places, recognizing it as traditional male headwear.⁸⁹

In June 1929, after a prolonged silence, the Azerbaijani Central Committee of the Communist Party, AzTsik, finally voiced an official position in response to the demands for a decree for forced *chadra* elimination. Party executives did not annul the decree from the

⁸⁸ Village soviets: Communist government bodies at the local level in rural areas.

⁸⁹ “Postanovlenie Komissariata Prosveshcheniia AzSSR o vospreshchenii nosheniia papakhi i chadry v uchebnykh zavedeniakh i kul’turno-prosvetitel’skikh uchrezhdeniakh,” (November 15, 1928–October 28, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o, 1, d. 561, ll. 13–18.

Commissariat of Enlightenment of 1928 banning women's appearance in *chadra* at educational and civil institutions. However, in an official statement, they endorsed the Moscow officials' anti-decree consideration, accusing the Azeri decree proponents of ignorance of class consciousness and betraying Communist ideas on women's liberation. They blamed decree advocates for propagandizing women's liberation only through mass unveiling, linking them to the old-Imperial reformers, and ignoring the most important aspects of the Soviet gender program to liberate Muslim women by attracting to industry.⁹⁰

It is important to admit that the practice of wearing *papaq* in villages gradually ceased by itself after the Second World War when many village men, returning from the European fronts, moved to the cities for jobs at industrial centers and, trying the fruits of urban culture, began to consider *papaq* old-fashioned. Nowadays, *papaq* as an old symbol of Azeri masculinity can be seen at souvenir shops in tourist districts or on male artists who perform national dances. *Chadra*, unlike *papaq*, totally disappeared from Azeri society, and its traces are impossible to find, at both the souvenir shops and even at museums.

Along with the campaign against *chadra* and *papaq*, there was also a brief state initiative that aimed to eliminate other symbols of Azeri society, namely musical instruments. In 1928, A. Karaev, R. Akhundov, and M. Guliyev announced that Azerbaijani music, performed on *tar*, *saz*, and *kamancha* (string musical instruments); *balaban* and *zurna* (wind instruments); and *nagara* and *daf* (drums), were primitive and old fashioned. They proclaimed that Azeri music possessed depressing characteristics of deficiency imposed by unenlightened Islamic culture. Thus, there was no place for old Azeri music in the process of building a modern and radiant society. These politicians stated in unison that Azeri society would become modern if it abandoned the national

⁹⁰ "Rezoliutsia ot dela rabotnits i krest'ianok TsK AzKPb," (June 20, 1929) ARDA f. 57, o, 1, d. 561, ll. 12–19.

instruments and started to use exclusively European musical devices. Along with this, they insisted on the creation of Western-style opera and ballet theaters.⁹¹ The results of this Soviet campaign were twofold for the evolution of modern Azeri music. The negative aspect was that Soviet Azeri musicians and composers, such as Uzeir Gadzhibekov, Fikrat Amirov, Kara Karaev, and others, answered the government call to modernize Azeri music and limited the role of these long-established musical instruments in Soviet Azeri culture. However, the positive aspect of the reformation was that they developed distinguished modern Azeri music by incorporating those national instruments into symphonic orchestras and the jazz bands.⁹²

Empowering the Village Women

The cultural revolution initiated by the radical Azerbaijani political elite to abolish the visual symbols of the patriarchal past proceeded along with the grandiose societal transformation all over the Soviet Union. In 1928, the Stalinist government initiated agrarian reforms. The reorganization of the rural world aimed to establish total state control over the countryside, to complete class warfare in the countryside, and to terminate patriarchal relationships.⁹³ *The Great Turn*, in Stalin's words, also aimed to erase all traces of capitalism, which had entered under the New Economic Policy, 1924–1928, and to transform the Soviet Union as quickly as possible, without regard to cost, into an industrialized socialist state.

⁹¹ "Protocol zasedaniia kollegii Narkomprosa AzSSR," (January 16, 1929–February 5, 1930) ARDA f. 57, o.1, d. 712, ll. 45–49.

⁹² Aida Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan: From Mugham to Opera (Ethnomusicology Multimedia)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 19–23.

⁹³ Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde*, 494–495.

Communists believed that collectivization of the countryside through cooperative labor, shared land, and state control would provide more food for the growing city proletariat and more resources for industry. Through collectivization, Communist leaders intended to free many peasants for industrial work in the cities and to enable them to extend their political authority over the remaining peasantry, ending old traditions and customs. The decision to collectivize the agrarian sector rapidly and forcefully was linked to the Communist agenda and Stalin's personal agenda of speedy industrialization. The First Five-Year Plan, 1928–1932 called for rapid industrialization of the economy, with an emphasis on heavy industry. The masterminds of the First Five-Year Plan, planned to transform Soviet agriculture from predominantly individual farms into a system of large state collective farms, focused particular hostility on the wealthier peasants, *kulaks*. Elimination of the well-off *kulak* households, forced collectivization of the remaining peasants, and the abrupt end of traditional culture in the rural world initiated a disastrous disruption of agricultural productivity and societal resistance all over the Soviet Union.⁹⁴

In Azerbaijan, the first Soviet land reform came to life in 1924. Land reform had two aims: taking land from the large landowners and granting land to the poor stratum of rural society to gain support for the Soviet regime. Most importantly, it aimed to break village patriarchal relationships based on the dependency of the poor on the wealthy, and to initiate class warfare in the countryside.⁹⁵ The Azerbaijani government stressed the gender egalitarian character of land reform. The new law on land ownership declared that men and women were equal in their rights to own land. However, Soviet law policed that only household heads, traditionally the male leaders, would become landowners. Muslim women could obtain an individual plot only after a

⁹⁴ On collectivization of agriculture and industrialization, see: Moshe Levin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (W. W. Norton, 1975) and Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilisation* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1997).

⁹⁵ Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde*, 494–495.

divorce or the death of their husbands.⁹⁶ This regulation was similar to that which Soviet authorities introduced in Uzbekistan and different from that in Russia, where the Russian peasant husbands and wives were equal owners of land.⁹⁷ It is important to note that these principles on land ownership in Azerbaijan did not violate the traditional *Sharia* norms, which stated that female property had to be monitored by a male relative.

The Soviet government followed their tsarist predecessors in agrarian reformation: in 1870, the old-Imperial authorities did not disturb these gender peculiarities of property law either. The Agrarian Reform Act of 1870 considered the allocation of a land plot, 5 *desiatins*, only for an adult male peasant, and recognized a man as the household leader. This tsarist reform also aimed to create village communities similar to Russian ones where the peasants held their land plots in communal ownership.⁹⁸ However, this reorganization was not successful and did not change the traditional forms of peasantry in Azerbaijan: the majority of male farmers, 70%, continued to possess their individual plots and did not build communal communities. Azeri Muslim farmers could rent some plots from large landowners and repay their debts with the agricultural products. The amount of the reimbursement was individually discussed between a rentier and a peasant, always men. That relationship was part of the traditional form of clan system where the large landlords, *bek* and *mullah*, regulated the life of the village communities.⁹⁹

In the mid-1920s, to propagandize Soviet land reform, government officials stressed that the Azerbaijani Communist Party made women independent and equal in land possession. *Zhenotdel* functionaries supported this claim, pointing to the government program that helped

⁹⁶ “Polozhenie o trudovom dome dlia odinokikh zhenshehin. Protokoly soveshchianii pri Narkomzdrave ob itogakh raboty po organizatsii detiaslei v uezdakh i bor’be s prostitutsiei v respublike,” (October 17, 1928–December 16, 1928) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 50, l. 5.

⁹⁷ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 112–113.

⁹⁸ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, 19.

⁹⁹ Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde*, 495.

single Muslim women to obtain some knowledge and skills to work with a plough, cultivate grains and cotton, and raise silkworms. To help women to become successful in farming the government also tried to unite Muslim female farmers in agricultural cooperatives, giving them free seeds and tools, and organizing kindergartens for their young children.¹⁰⁰ However, in December 1928, Azeri *Zhenotdel* officials complained that after the land redistribution, the number of Azeri women who worked independently on their land plots was very small and their cooperative farms were not profitable. Female farmers still preferred to rely on male relatives and refused to send their young children to the village kindergartens.¹⁰¹

Along with this, *Zhenotdel* officials stressed that a widowed landowner became an extremely attractive candidate for a new marriage. After entering the new marriage, a female smallholder passed management of her farm to her new husband and left agricultural society to focus on her family. *Zhenotdel* workers called that process “a returning to an unproductive existence.”¹⁰² As a result, land redistribution reform did not make Muslim women fully equal in the patriarchal village, though it brought some support to the Soviet regime from poor farmers who obtained land plots expropriated from rich landowners. However, the end of individual landownership came in 1929, the year of mass collectivization and societal transformation.

The collectivization of 1929 brought dramatic changes to rural Azeri society by eliminating the traditional leaders and imposing new ones in the countryside. Soviet regulations allowed former large landowners to stay in villages or provinces if they had willingly given their property.

¹⁰⁰ “Polozhenie o trudovom dome dlia odinokikh zhenshchin. Protokoly soveshchianii pri Narkomzdrave ob itogakh raboty po organizatsii detiaslei v uezdakh i bor’be s prostitutsiei v respublike,” (October 17, 1928–December 16, 1928) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 50, ll. 4–9.

¹⁰¹ “Polozhenie o trudovom dome dlia odinokikh zhenshchin. Protokoly soveshchianii pri Narkomzdrave ob itogakh raboty po organizatsii detiaslei v uezdakh i bor’be s prostitutsiei v respublike,” (October 17, 1928–December 16, 1928) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 50, ll. 10–14.

¹⁰² “Itogi raboty delegatskikh sobranii,” (January 1927–December 1928) RGASPI, f. 17, o. 32, d. 115, l. 44.

Many were pressed to resettle and leave the provinces or were arrested. The Leader of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan, A. Karaev, stated that some landlords however, retained some land plots and even become members of the local village councils and proposed to denounce them as class enemies.¹⁰³ Soviet state officials encouraged village women to participate in dekulakization campaigns, dispossessing wealthy men and denouncing traditional leaders as the *class dushmani*, class foes.¹⁰⁴

The Azeri *Zhenotdel* and Party officials used direct and abusive verbal attacks on the former nobility and wealthy people as the perceived enemies of Soviet initiatives, and particularly unveiling. Furthermore, in 1928, the Azeri Communist leaders declared that opposition to Muslim women's liberation and other Soviet reforms had strong support from the influential religious authorities that was deeply rooted in the rural world. Azeri Soviet political leaders proclaimed that the priests, in particular, influenced former large landlords to launch the counterattack to Soviet gender policy in villages.¹⁰⁵

To promote state policy against Islamic spiritual leaders, Azeri government officials announced many facts that illustrated the negative role of religion in traditional society. For instance, they claimed that in 1926, in Shamkhor region alone, almost all teachers were former *mullahs*. In 1928, in Geokchai region, nine out of ten teachers belonged to the priesthood, continuing to regulate the life of their community. Considering these and other facts, high-ranked

¹⁰³ A. Karaev, "Deviaty s'ezd AzKPb. Stenograficheskiy bulliten' 2 (Baku, March 1929) RGASPI f.17, op. 17, d. 32. ll. 28–29.

¹⁰⁴ Rakhmeeva, "Shestoe zasedanie Azebaidzanskogo soveshchaniia rabotnits otdela rabotnits i kres'ianok," (1 October 1929), GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 233, ll. 17–18; 25.

¹⁰⁵ Nukhrat, "Tsirkuliar tov. Kasparovoi 'O zaderzhke antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'manok (sovershenno sekretno),' (Top secret, 9 October 1924) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, l. 6; Protokoly, "Materialy iz svodki otdela OGPU #12 "Dukhovenstvo (sovershenno sekretno),' (Top secret, No date) RGASPI f. 17, op. 10, d. 138, ll. 26–28, 32, 62; Mekhtiev and Isakov, "V komissiiu po voprosam kul'ta pri prizidiiume TsK SSSR," (Top secret, 27 December 1936) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 1–4.

Azeri Party leaders, such as A. Karaev, G. Musabekov, and G. Guliyev, unleashed the anti-religious campaign that led to the closing of the spiritual centers.

The closure and confiscation of the mosques was so widespread and aggressively performed that it received criticism from Moscow officials and some Azeri Communists. Thus, S. Efendiev, the chairman of the AzTsik, disapproved of that process, calling it the “socialist competition on the cultural front.”¹⁰⁶ *Kommunist* newspaper records between 1928 and 1929 demonstrate the number of closed and expropriated religious centres in several regions. In Shamakhi, the regional authorities demolished 13 out of 18 mosques and used the building materials for the construction of a theatre.¹⁰⁷ In Geokchai, local officials converted thirty-six mosques into entertainment centres and warehouses.¹⁰⁸ M. Guliyev, the Commissar of Enlightenment, in his article *Firka va Din, Party and Religion*, stated that religious leaders, settled in 969 *Shia* and 400 *Sunni* mosques across the republic, were a potential threat to Soviet reforms on modernization and demanded their total annihilation.¹⁰⁹

In June 1928, *Kommunist* published an official resolution that declared the incompatibility of religion with modernity. M. Guliyev, the mastermind of the resolution *Medeniat Inglabi va Din, Cultural Revolution and Religion*, condemned Islam and the ways its norms harmed societal development in six chapters. In chapter five, he stressed the negative role of Islam on women’s societal position. He pointed to the religious norms that kept Muslim women secluded, veiled, and deprived of basic rights. Guliyev criticized *mullahs* for their century-long support of Muslim man’s superiority over woman, making her an object for sale and thus encouraging polygyny and bride-money. In his words, it was Soviet power that brought true liberation to Azeri women and any

¹⁰⁶ “Bizim ishlerimiz hakkında,” *Kommunist*, October 22, 1929.

¹⁰⁷ “Bize Allah va onun evi lazim deil,” *Kommunist*, October 30, 1928.

¹⁰⁸ “Butun meschidlar mekhv edin! Mektebler Gurma!” *Kommunist*, February 4, 1929.

¹⁰⁹ M. Guliyev, “Firka va din,” *Kommunist*, June 6, 1928.

pause or weakness in the reform process could invalidate the achievements in gender reorganization, bringing back Islamic parochial practices.¹¹⁰ In accordance with this official declaration, Azeri Communists considered any cooperation with reformed clerics on methods of women's emancipation as dangerous and insisted on a total abolition of religion in gender relationship.¹¹¹

The radical Azeri anti-religious campaign went against Soviet policy on relaxation of the treatment of Islam and its priesthood. The Moscow directives of 1928–1930 dictated Azeri officials not to violate the authority of Muslim clergy, stressing that the religious question was part of the whole Soviet oriental politics and required the extremely delicate reformation like the problem of nationalities. The All-Soviet Communist government was alarmed by the scale of resistance to Soviet religious reform, particularly in Uzbekistan, where Islamic priests were persecuted, and spiritual centres were confiscated. In June 1929, the Presidium of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan [AzTsK KPb] received a firm order from Moscow to return all Islamic religious centres, which had been confiscated and converted into secular premises, to the local communities.¹¹² Azeri officials had obeyed that order, however, they modified it to fit their agenda. They continued to threaten Islamic clerics, labelling them and former rural nobility as the major dangerous influences on the female and rural masses in general.¹¹³

In 1929, in his report entitled *Bakinskii Proletariat and Azerbaidzhanskaia Derevnia, Baku Proletariat and Azerbaijani Village*, presented at the XVIII All Party Meeting, A. Karaev stressed

¹¹⁰ M. Guliyev, "Medeniat inglabi va din," *Kommunist*, June 13, 1928.

¹¹¹ "Zekhmetchi Insanlar, Gulag Az!" *Kommunist*, June 29, 1929; "Mullah bizim Muallim deil," *Kommunist*, December 13, 1928.

¹¹² Molotov, "Proekt rezoliutsii po dokladu ob itogakh II s'ezda soiuzu bezbozhnikov i o rabote antireligioznoi komissii TsK," (4 August 1929) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 7, ll. 12–13. (Top secret, No Date) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 69, ll. 21–22.

¹¹³ Mekhtiev and Isakov, "V komissiiu po voprosam kul'ta pri prizidume TsK SSSR," (Top secret, 27 December 1936) GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 1–4.

many obstacles raised by class enemies to hinder the process of Soviet reforms. He emphasized their strong position in villages, in particular, and insisted on total war to destroy them.¹¹⁴ Karaev argued that peasant women would be the most powerful societal segment to destroy opposition to Soviet power in village. He stressed that Muslim village women were more active than urban women. Agamali-ogli echoed this statement, saying that women were more honestly devoted to the ideas of Communism and in particular to land redistribution than men.¹¹⁵ A. Karaev believed that this was because the rural women were traditionally independent, never veiled, and secluded. Along with this, he credited the Soviet policy that granted women land and involved them in the village soviets to decide the community problems equally with men.¹¹⁶

Baberowski argues that the Soviet regime forcefully demanded that Azeri women participate in the village soviets, threatening to apply restrictive measures to those families that refused to send their female members to vote or to become members in those village organizations. Along with this, Baberowski undermined the results of Azeri women's activity in the village soviets, stating that Azeri women never contributed because after the end of the election campaign they stayed at home being terrorized by their husbands, who promised to kill them for any political activity.¹¹⁷

However, Party records and statistics demonstrate that native Party leaders, clearly understanding the peculiarities of gender norms in some Azeri communities, organized gender-separated voting stations during elections.¹¹⁸ By implementing this tactic, they attracted many

¹¹⁴A. Karaev, *Bakinskii Proletariat and Azerbaidzhanskaia Derevnia* (Baku: AzGiz, 1929), 25–28.

¹¹⁵ Agamali-ogli, "Zasedanie prezidiuma natsional'nostei SSSR," (December 1927) GARF f. 3316, op. 20, d. 201, l. 323.

¹¹⁶ Karaev, *Bakinskii Proletariat and Azerbaidzhanskaia Derevnia*, 30.

¹¹⁷ Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde*, 454–455.

¹¹⁸ "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoi kompanii po uezdnam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January–December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, ll. 10–13, 16–18.

Muslim women and did not deter conservative men from Soviet village elections. The Party records of the early 1930s also indicate that by establishing a culture of social and political activism among Muslim women in a village, Soviet authorities helped women to voice their concerns about their own empowerment in Azeri society. Azeri official records also revealed that for the majority of Azeri village women, gender issues were more important rather than the class conflict promoted by government leaders. As the Progress Records of the Communist Party Activity in a Village indicate, Azeri village women mostly denounced those men who kept them secluded and were abusive and backward individuals. Very few records illustrate Azeri women's struggle against former wealthy and noble village men while participating in village social and political life.¹¹⁹

Azeri women of the Agdash region complained that the male village executives did not distribute voting cards to them. Thus, they demanded postponement of balloting until women received the ballots. Defending their right to vote, they were able to change the course of the elections in their community. In Khanabad village, forty-six local men voted for Yusuf Vali as a leader of the village council. However, fifty-seven women opposed his election and ostracized him for improper behavior towards women. In Kasile village, women outvoted the candidate pointing out that he kept his wife secluded. Overall, in Agdash region, there were 5,002 Azeri women who participated in elections to the local village soviets along with 10,443 Azeri male voters.¹²⁰ In Gyandzhe region, particularly in Akhmedli village, women demanded the opening of a new school with female teachers because they did not trust male instructors who came from the city or had an education gained at *madrakah*. In Amirvar village women opposed the election of a man who was

¹¹⁹ About the village women activity, see: "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoii kompanii po uezdam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January–December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775. "Svedeniia Azkomtruzhenits ob itogakh kompanii po sniatiiu chadry, o kolichestve artelei i zaniatykh v nikh rabotnits," (January 5, 1929- February 14, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 125

¹²⁰ "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoii kompanii po uezdam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January–December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, ll. 3–4.

the son of the former large landowner. Women stated that the candidate's father aggressively threatened the *kolkhoz* members, saying he would take back all his land plots which had been allotted to poor farmers by the Soviet power.¹²¹



Figure 31. Azeri rural women discussing village matters, Karabakh, 1933. AAKFD photo.

Party functionaries acknowledged that nomadic women had much more authority in their communities than sedentary women. In Dzhebrail region, inhabited mostly by the nomadic Azeri Turkic tribes and semi-nomadic Kurds, women were powerfully active in defending their rights. Those women, mostly widows, even argued with Party emissaries to return of polygyny. They argued that Muslim men preferred to marry the girls who had never been wed, and thus, widows with children lost the chance to enter another marriage. Local women also criticized those men who opposed their empowerment. Women from Dilagarda Village complained that they had to sit on the steps of the building because the male village leaders did not allow them to be present at

¹²¹ "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoi kompanii po uezdnam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January–December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, ll. 5–6.

the discussion of the local budget. In Shukurbekli village, the male Party official refused to listen to women's petition that presented several cases of domestic violence. The report also indicates that in several villages, Kurd-Makhmudlu, Khalafa, Ishiglu, Shakhsavan, and Zilanlu, a fight occurred between women and men over the creditability of their candidates.¹²²

In Kazakh region, in Tatly village, women disapproved of several male candidates, denouncing them as bandits. In Kushchi village, women did not allow the election of a man, arguing that he was polygamous and treated one of his wives very badly. In Dondar-Kushchi, village women ostracized four candidates because they kept their wives secluded. Overall, the report demonstrates that in 1925 there were 190 Azeri female members of the village soviets in the Dzhebrail region alone.¹²³ The Party report also indicates that Nakhichevan region, a province in Western Azerbaijan that has a border with Turkey, was a citadel of opposition to the Soviet regime, and local men violently opposed all Soviet initiatives. Moreover, the leader of the regional Communist Party branch in Nakhichevan argued that women could wear *chadra* because there was not any official regulation to remove it.¹²⁴ Party and *Zhenotdel* officials declared that Nakhichevan region had the lowest number of women in the village soviets.¹²⁵ They explained this fact through the domination of the strong clan system, the long-established power of the religious and traditional customs, and the region's long distance from Baku and the central Communist government.¹²⁶

¹²² "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoii kompanii po uezdam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January- December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, ll. 8–11.

¹²³ "Doklady i statisticheskie svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoii kompanii po uezdam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January- December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, l.12.

¹²⁴ "Svedeniia Azkomtruzhenits ob itogakh kompanii po sniatiiu chadry, o kolichestve artelei i zaniatykh v nikh rabotnits," (January 5, 1929- February 14, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 125, ll. 3–5.

¹²⁵ "Svedeniia Azkomtruzhenits ob itogakh kompanii po sniatiiu chadry, o kolichestve artelei i zaniatykh v nikh rabotnits," (January 5, 1929- February 14, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 125, l. 5.

¹²⁶ "Doklady i statisticheskie Svedeniia ob uchastii zhenshchin v otchetno-perevybornoii ompanii po uezdam AzSSR v 1926 godu," (January–December 1926) ARDA f. 379, o. 3, d. 1775, ll. 14–15.

Violence as the Response to Societal Reforms in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1928–1930

The *Redd Olsun Chadra* campaign and the introduction of female executives in village soviets became an important part of a clash of political forces, as the dispossessed and disempowered former male authorities tried to resist the Soviet program. Soviet policies for women's empowerment also aggravated household and societal conflicts, provoking violence against Muslim women. On October 1, 1929, the all-Union Communist Party leaders and government officials proposed to interpret the murders of emancipated women by their husbands and the murders of female activists by old authorities as equally political crimes, bonding murderous husbands and "alien classes" together. The Soviet state began to consider crimes against women as the most important political question to be discussed. Moscow officials issued a resolution that assigned forty-five days for the whole investigation process of crimes committed against emancipated Muslim women all over the Soviet Union. The court procedure to issue the final verdict should take no longer than ten days.¹²⁷ They had to introduce these measures after the large-scale of violence against unveiled and politically active women in Central Asia, in particular in Uzbekistan.

In 1926, in Uzbekistan, the Communist Party's Central Asia Bureau officials initiated cultural revolution, a campaign known as the *Hujum*, attack. In the period between 1927 and 1929, the state started a crusade against veiling, along with the closure of mosques, the arrest of Islamic priests, the dispossession of land from large landowners, challenging the traditional structures of

¹²⁷ "Dogovor mezhdru rabotnikami organov iustitsii vostochnykh narodov na sorenovanie po bor'be s bytovymi prestupleniiami," "Tsirkuliar TsIK AzSSR ob usilenii raboty sredi zhenshchin," (December 31, 1927–May 27, 1931) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 18, l. 24.

authority in family and society. As Kamp states, many men became responsible for the murder of hundreds of women in Uzbekistan.¹²⁸ Douglas Northrop insists there were thousands of victims.¹²⁹ That level of violence was incomparable with the level of hostility in Azerbaijan, where the number of female victims, in accordance with the official record of the Persecutor's Office of Azerbaijan Republic, was eleven.¹³⁰

In modern historiography, extraordinarily little has been written about the accounts and causes of violence toward emancipated and politically active Azeri women. Existing studies are limited to the works of J. Baberowski, F. Hayat, A. Muradova, and G. Ibragimova. Baberowski explains the low number of female victims in Azerbaijan as cases unreported by Azeri government officials who did not want to spoil the record of the reform's process.¹³¹ Anthropologist F. Hayat briefly introduces several facts about the harassment of unveiled women in Baku alone, connecting them with ethnic tensions between Azeri Muslims and Communist authorities of Armenian heritage.¹³² Muradova considers the state-run reform campaign for unveiling as "a direct violation of human rights" that caused several crimes.¹³³ Ibragimova claims that the state initiated rapid *chadra* abolition to force women into industry and that sparked the violent opposition and killing of several Azeri women in Baku.¹³⁴ Despite the various opinions on the reasons behind the murder of the Azeri women, all historians point out that very few women lost their lives during the campaign for their liberation and empowerment in 1920s.

¹²⁸ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 186–188.

¹²⁹ Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 99–101.

¹³⁰ "AzSSR Ali Mekhkeme Prokurorlugu Idaresi. Prestupleniia na Pochve Raskreposhcheniia" ARDA f. 917, oo. 3-4, dd. 61, 93, 143, 226, 304, 322.

¹³¹ Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde*, 627.

¹³² Hayat, *Azeri Women in Transition*, 92–98.

¹³³ Muradova, *Vovlechenie zhenshchiny*, 23.

¹³⁴ Ibragimova, *Azərbaycan gadini*, 196–200, 260–268.

To explain violence against women, I define men as one of the crucial social actors that forced women to stay in a subordinate position within patriarchal society. By 1930, Azeri society was a male-dominated society that had non-symmetrical gender relations where men played intense public roles. Azeri husbands contributed less labor than wives to running the household but took much from the women's unpaid labor. In such social and family organization, coercive control was a crucial part of maintaining male domination within the domestic sphere. E. Stark argues that "beating, imposing strict dress codes, isolating women are the means of the coercive control."¹³⁵ As it was discussed elsewhere, many Azeri men employed all of those means to control their female family members. From 1928, some Azeri men tried to strengthen that control as an answer to the Soviet cultural reforms that disrupted traditional Muslim community and family structures. Soviet reforms removed the traditional societal and family leaders from their positions. Many men responded violently to that societal transformation, directing their anger toward the traditionally submissive members of their community, women.

On the scale of atrocities, crime against women in Azerbaijan was different from the violence in Uzbekistan, because the Soviet program for mass unveiling destabilized the traditional structure of Uzbek society, shaped in the Imperial period, more than in Azerbaijan. Russian colonialists in Uzbekistan did not cooperate with local nobilities and did not integrate the conquered population into the Russian social-cultural system. Such politics established the boundaries between colonizers and colonized that limited interactions between Russian settlers and the local population. As a result, local people aiming to preserve the traditional societal order imposed boundaries to keep separate from alien culture. From 1925, the Soviet officials

¹³⁵ E. Stark, *Coercive Control: The Entrapment of Women in Personal Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13–18.

introducing radical religious, agrarian, and educational reforms severely undermined those boundaries. Thus, those who opposed the Soviet reforms joined *Basmachi*, emigrated, or attacked their supporters, at levels unknown in Azerbaijan, whose population, particularly in Baku, was well-integrated into the Russian cultural milieu.¹³⁶

Crime against women in Azerbaijan was also different from violence in Uzbekistan in its presentation. In Azerbaijan, as the records demonstrate, the majority of crimes against women were spontaneous. They were results of the disagreements with female family members and never planned by a group of people. Azeri men did not terrorize other women by killing their own wives or daughters. Not a single female person in Azerbaijan, unlike in Uzbekistan, was killed for alleged misbehavior in a symbolic act of gang rape, left as a dismembered female corpse with a cutthroat or purposefully ruined face to terrorize other women. However, by killing women, the male murderers, equally in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, clearly manifested that the community and family held an authority over women. In both republics, regardless of the degree of violence, Muslim men tried to reinforce the gender hierarchy by considering unveiled and publicly active women as a threat to the traditional family order. Thus, I place men, but not the state or colonial authority, as the responsible power behind those deadly acts.

Scholars such as Baberowski, Muradova, and Ibragimova have another opinion on the reasons for these atrocities. They state that the Soviet campaign for women's empowerment in villages and mass unveiling were colonial projects and produced the anticolonial resistance. However, they ignore the Azeri Communists' genuine pursuit to modernize Muslim society, developed from the concepts of late-Imperial enlightenment and supported by the Soviet state. They also neglect the primary sources: the *Zhenotdel* files, the journal *Sharg Gadini*. Most

¹³⁶ I drew my comparison on the violence toward the unveiled and emancipated women in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan from: Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 186 – 215.

importantly, they ignore the voices of many ordinary Azeri women who answered the call to liberate themselves. None of the historians ever studied the court documents, or, especially important, the personal files of the victims and those women who survived in their struggle for equality. The Azerbaijani State Archive possesses the documents that reflect women's struggle to acquire power and equality in the new society. These archival records, united under one title, *Prestupleniia na Pochve Rarskreposhcheniia, The Crimes against Emancipation*, demonstrate that many Azeri men were not ready to accept those changes and thus killed the modern-thinking Azeri women.

In Azerbaijan, victims of attack became martyrs whose images the *Zhenotdel* and government officials used to propagandize the Soviet struggle with the old traditions and their defenders. The murder of Saria Khalilova, which was carried out by her father with support from her former husband and younger brother, received considerable attention in the press and was commemorated in the state-organized mass funeral procession, and with a monument and numerous writings.¹³⁷ Saria Khalilova's personal story mirrors not only gender roles in patriarchal society but also the broader societal conflict between *qaranliq*, ignorance, and *ishig*, enlightenment, that the Azeri cultural reformers had tried to resolve since the end of the nineteenth century.

Saria Khalilova (1893–1930) was born in Baku to the family of a small merchant, *alverchi*. She received traditional education at home. At age 15 her father married her to her cousin who was ten years older than her, Movsum Khalilov, from Shamakhi city. Khalilov was a merchant, *alverchi*, running two shops in Shamakhi and Kiurdamir. This business required much traveling and Saria was often left alone with their four children. Several years later she returned to Baku to

¹³⁷ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, O. 3, d. 143.

live with her parents. In 1927, Saria initiated a divorce from her husband, citing his frequent absence from the family and neglect of her and their children. By 1927, her elder son had become a student at the Military School and the other children, including the teenaged girls, planned to go to college. Khalilov had different views about the girls' upbringing and was particularly against his wife's schooling and social activism.¹³⁸

In the mid-1920s, Saria went to *The Ali Bairamov Club* to study. Her exercise books illustrate that at the club she learned how to write using Latin script and learned the Russian language. She also learned basic arithmetic and science. Along with this, she obtained knowledge of the Soviet Civil Code on Marriage and Family, which equipped her well to work as an instructor at the same club in 1929. In December 1929, she received a promotion to become one of the leaders at the regional club for Muslim women.¹³⁹ In one of her letters to her husband, Movsum Khalilov, she explained that as a good student, after the training at the club, she would go to work in [unspecified] region to emancipate other Muslim women. She assured him that she would take their children with her and provide them with good care. She also complained about his bad treatment of her as an individual during their married life. She criticized him for imposing many restrictions that deprived her of "light" [enlightenment] that she finally found at *The Ali Bairamov Club*. Khalilova also assured him that she left him not to get a new husband but to pursue her desire to become an educated person and to have an interesting life.¹⁴⁰ Remarkably, the veil was never an issue in the discussion of her emancipation. However, this explanation did not help Khalilov to appreciate his wife's desire for independence. Khalilov appealed to her father and other relatives

¹³⁸ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, 0. 3, d. 143, ll. 4–9.

¹³⁹ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, 0. 3, d. 143, ll. 10–11.

¹⁴⁰ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, 0. 3, d. 143, l. 12.

to find a measure to stop his wife from leading such life. He stressed the traditional moral norms, saying that if a man cannot stop a woman, he is not a proper man. He blamed her father and brother for being weak to allow such a disgrace in their household.

On January 29, 1930, after many demands to return her to her husband, Saria's father seized the moment when the children were at school and Saria was at home, and in the presence of her brother, former husband, and mother, stabbed her with a butcher knife. The forensic examination revealed that Saria had received thirty-seven stab wounds: one was in the thigh, nine in the chest, eleven in the face and neck, and sixteen in the arms and palms. The large number of wounds in the palms and hands indicated that the Saria tried to resist and protect herself.¹⁴¹ In a very short time, between January 29 and March 30, 1930, the Prosecution authorities sentenced her father, Haji Ali Kasimov, 62 years old, to capital punishment, and her former husband, Movsum Khalilov, 47 years old, and her younger brother, Alekbar Mekhtiev, 20 years old, to 10 years of imprisonment each without parole. Her mother, who witnessed the murder and asked the neighbors for help, was found not guilty, and was obliged to be a guardian for Saria's children.

The murder of Saria Khalilova made her a martyr, whose image the *Zhenotdel* and government officials used to propagandize the Soviet program against old traditions and their defenders.¹⁴² The government initiated a show trial to raise public awareness that the Soviet state would severely punish those who opposed Muslim women's liberation. *Zhenotdel* officers, with support from the Communist Party, converted the private funeral ceremony into a mass demonstration. Saria's body, dressed in European clothing and placed in a European-style coffin decorated with flowers, was accompanied by hundreds of women.¹⁴³ The funeral procession

¹⁴¹ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, O. 3, d. 143, l. 38.

¹⁴² "Sinif dushmanla amanzys mubarize. Saria Khlailova defn olundu," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1 (1930) 13-28.

¹⁴³ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, O. 3, d. 143, ll. 34-36.

symbolized the break with old patriarchal practices and was in total opposition to the traditional Islamic norms of burial, which required the human body, regardless of gender, to be wrapped in *savan*, an unbleached piece of white shroud, put on palanquin, and carried exclusively by men to the cemetery.

The local Communist officials organized the mass procession of women, who carried banners that with the slogans to end of seclusion and veiling. Many threw their *chadras* off and treaded on them. The Communist leaders gave speeches promising to atone for Saria's blood by punishing all of her enemies along with the enemies of all Muslim women. By organizing such a public funeral procession, the state also promoted the new position of women in all aspects of Soviet life.¹⁴⁴ In 1930, state authorities installed a bust of Saria Khalilova to commemorate her as a martyr. Until the end of Communist leadership in the republic, the day of Saria's death, January 29, became a day of official ceremony, when the leaders of the Youth League of the Young Communists, *Pioneers*, accepted new members into their organization.¹⁴⁵

Saria Khalilova's murder was not an only incident in which Muslim men opposed women's emancipation. There are several other documents, united in one file under the title *The Crimes against Emancipation*, that represent several instances of women's murder by their husbands. One of those documents, entitled *The Jealousy-Related Murder Cases*, contains the criminal dossiers of Kasumov M., Khalilov K., Babaev B., Babaev S., Babaev E., and Gasanov I., who stabbed their wives to death.¹⁴⁶ In 228 pages, the inspectors of the Republic Prosecutor's Office proved that these men killed their wives for their allegedly disgraceful behavior while studying at the [gender-

¹⁴⁴ "Medani hujum davam etdirilmedir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2 (1930) 13-18.

¹⁴⁵ "Delo ob ubiistve grazhdanki Sarii Khalilovoi," (February 4–February 11, 1930) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 143, ll. 144-146 (photos).

¹⁴⁶ "Verkhovnyi Sud AzSSR. Ugolovnye dela po obvineniiu v umyshlennom ubiistve na pochve revnosti," (October 13, 1933–March 27, 1935) ARDA f. 917, o. 4, d. 61, ll. 1–228.

segregated] clubs in Baku or its surroundings. Officials presented the facts that these convicted men had opposed their wives' work outside the home and had discouraged them from studying further at the colleges, arguing that women used those places to interact freely with male strangers. The Soviet authority connected these murderous acts with class consciousness. The official resolution stated that these men came from old, rich, and noble families, that they did not welcome Soviet power, and thus, that they raised many obstacles to the Communist-style initiative to emancipate Muslim women. They all were sentenced to capital punishment for their crimes.¹⁴⁷

Another case, entitled *The Criminal Case of Meshadi Askerov who Murdered his Wife for her Activism and Work at Kolkhoz*, clearly demonstrates the official discourse that linked anti-feminist hostility with class conflict. In Gyandzhe region, Askerov Meshadi killed his wife Afshan, who was 22 years old and seven months pregnant, by beating her to death. The documents state that he committed this crime because of his strong disapproval of her work at the *kolkhoz* and for her activity at the village soviet and Muslim Women's Club. Askerov also threatened to kill his mother-in-law, also a village activist, for her harmful influence on his wife. The documents also indicate that Askerov already had a criminal record for killing a young boy, a *Pioneer*, who testified against Askerov at the court. In his testimony, the eleven-year-old *Pioneer* stated that Askerov, a former large landowner, constantly terrorized his father, promising to take back the land plot allotted to his family by Soviet powers. For this murder, Askerov received eight years of imprisonment but served only three of them for unidentified reasons. However, the Soviet government took the case of killing a Muslim female activist more seriously, organizing a show

¹⁴⁷ "Verkhovnyi Sud AzSSR. Ugolovnye dela po obvineniiu v umyshlennom ubiistve na pochve revnosti," (October 13, 1933–March 27, 1935) ARDA f. 917, o. 4, d. 61, ll. 200–228.

trial and making it public. In July 1931, the members of the Public Prosecutor's Office issued a death sentence to Askerov.¹⁴⁸

Another case, entitled *The Criminal Case of Nasir Assad ogli for Murdering his Wife during the Process of Emancipation*, shows that even *medani*, an enlightened man, could kill his wife. Nasir Assad ogli was a public school teacher and instructor at the *Likbez*. He was very well known for his social activism to end illiteracy among people of Gyandzhe region. However, on June 18, 1932, he killed his wife, Fatma Eldis qizi, by stabbing her to death. The government authority organized a show trial and attracting mass media to cover the process. As a result, on June 27, 1932, just nine days after the murder, the Prosecutor's officer assigned a death sentence for the crime. However, advocates could prove that Nasir Assad ogli was a kind person in *byt*, everyday life, and an ardent supporter of the Communist power. Nasir Assad ogli also acknowledged his guilt, referring to his jealous character. Thus, on July 11, 1932, taking into consideration his personal record and his repentance, the authorities changed the term of punishment from the death sentence to ten years of imprisonment.¹⁴⁹

The criminal case against Abbas Alia Assad ogli investigated the murder of a young female teacher, Aian Sultanova, on January 12, 1926, in Shamkhor region. The peculiarity of this case is that the murderer, Abbas Alia Assad ogli, twenty-five years old, received a death sentence when the state did not equate everyday crimes to crimes against Soviet power yet. The authority issued a death penalty for his crime, connecting it to the old practice of bride kidnapping that Soviet power made illegal. During the trial, Abbas Alia acknowledged that he wanted to marry Aian Sultanova, a schoolteacher, who opposed this union because of his lack of education and

¹⁴⁸ “Ugolovnoe delo po obvineniiu Askerova Mashadi za ubiistve svoii zheni za to chto ona byla aktivistka i rabotala v kolkhoze,” (May–June 1931) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 226, ll. 13–35.

¹⁴⁹ “Delo po obvineniiu Nasir Assad ogli po stat'e 70 Ugolovnogo Kodeksa AzSSR, Terroristicheskii Akt – ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposchenia,” (June 18, 1932–June 25, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 304. ll. 33–101.

unattractiveness. Thus, Abbas, with group of his friends, organized her abduction on her way home from the school. Aian resisted and promised to denounce him. As witnesses stated during the trial, Abbas panicked when she produced so much noise and was genuinely reluctant to marry him, so he shot her in the head. In May 1926, he was executed. It should be noted that there is no information about the punishment for those men who helped Abbas to kidnap Aian Sultanova.¹⁵⁰

In June 1932, in Baku, Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli killed his wife, Babaeva Umai, by inflicting fifty-seven stab wounds. Like some other killers, Agaverdiev explained his crime by citing his wife's alleged infidelity.¹⁵¹ The file contains several letters that Babaeva wrote in the spring of 1932 to the local police department, asking to protect her from the husband who regularly threatened to kill her. In one of the letters, she stated that Agaverdiev was a backward person who had come from Iran for a better work opportunity. She stressed that he did not respect the Soviet reforms that made man and woman equal and opposed her studying and working. Umai also emphasized that she was a Communist, who studied at the Polytechnic College to become an engineer and worked at the chemical plant. Along with this, during the summertime, Umai went to *kolkhoz* to teach village Muslim women at the rural *Likbez*. However, her husband did not support these activities, citing traditional gender norms. He stated that she was involved in frivolous behavior with other men while she was outside the home. The documents also revealed that Agaverdiev spent considerable time trying to collect information to prove her allegedly disgraceful behavior.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ “Delo po obvineniiu po stat’e 142 UK AzSSR, za ubiistvo uchitel’nitsy Aian Sultanovoi (rasstrel),” (January 12, 1926–May 12, 1926) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 93 (b), ll. 1–148.

¹⁵¹ “Delo po obvineniiu Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli po stat’e 70 UK AzSSR- Terroristicheskii akt, ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposhcheniia,” (June 21, 1932–October 4, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 322, ll. 1–92.

¹⁵² “Delo po obvineniiu Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli po stat’e 70 UK AzSSR- Terroristicheskii akt, ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposhcheniia,” (June 21, 1932–October 4, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 322, ll. 20–29.

In another letter, Umai revealed that along with a group of men of Iranian heritage, her husband was engaged in stealing potash from the plant and selling it on the black market. Witnessing how they divided the money at her home, she promised them she would denounce their deeds to the police. As a result, Agaverdiev swore to kill her if she did not give him some time to escape to Iran. He also offered her the chance to go with him. Umai rejected this, and in a panic that he could forcefully take her with him or to kill her if she refused, she asked the police to defend her, stressing that she was a Soviet citizen and enjoyed the Soviet achievements that made women equal. Being terrorized by her husband, Umai stopped coming home, spending nights at the plant's shop or the plant's canteen. Agaverdiev demanded that she return, threatening to spoil her reputation, which would lead to her exclusion from the Communist Party and from the College. Umai refused to return, and on June 28, 1932, Agaverdiev waited for Umai on the way to her place of work, and then killed her by stabbing her fifty-seven times.

In their report, inspectors from the Prosecutor's Office connected the murder of Umai to the murder of Saria Khalilova, and presented this case as a crime against Muslim women's liberation performed by a man who came from a patriarchal country that lacked Soviet-style gender equality.¹⁵³ However, Agaverdiev refused to accept the allegations regarding the Soviet gender program, insisting that he killed her exclusively for her infidelity. Agaverdiev's statement went against the witnesses' testimonies, which maintained that Agaverdiev did not allow Umai to study and to work. The witnesses insisted that he was particularly against her trips to a village to teach rural Muslim women.¹⁵⁴ In accordance with Article 70 UK AzSSR, the Prosecutor's officers sentenced Agaverdiev to death. However, being a non-Soviet citizen, Agaverdiev appealed to the

¹⁵³ "Delo po obvineniiu Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli po stat'e 70 UK AzSSR- Terroristicheskii akt, ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposhcheniia," (June 21, 1932–October 4, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 322, l. 66.

¹⁵⁴ "Delo po obvineniiu Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli po stat'e 70 UK AzSSR — Terroristicheskii akt, ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposhcheniia," (June 21, 1932–October 4, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 322, l. 69.

Supreme Court, and his term of punishment was changed to ten years of imprisonment and confiscation of his estate.¹⁵⁵

Hence, the eleven criminal cases represented in the Persecutor's Office protocols demonstrate that the majority of women who lost their lives for being active in Soviet political and social spheres were wives, daughters, and sisters of men who opposed emancipation, their desire to study in the city, or to enter the professions outside the family. Only a few accounts concerned the murders of women activists, leading figures in village soviets or clubs for Muslim women's emancipation. It should be noted that before the 1928, Party officials acknowledged that the violence against women in Azeri society constituted occasional acts and characterized it as the domestic violence of oppressive men over their wives, daughters, and sisters. From 1928 on, with the introduction of the *Redd Olsun Chadra* campaign and the Party-led program to use peasant women in class conflict, Party officials declared that those Azeri women who did not unveil and did not become politically active did not do it because they were not allowed to by ignorant male family members under influence of *mullahs*, large landowners, and rich merchants. Such discourse prompted the centre to increase pressure against patriarchal traditions, claiming that they were extremely strong in Muslim societies, and to enforce stricter measures to eliminate them along with their advocates.¹⁵⁶ In this discourse, resistance to unveiling and political activism was located in men who opposed the Soviet meaning of emancipation. Having "Soviet" as the core of the accusation automatically placed those men in among the class enemies. The women's journal *Sharg Gadini* portrayed the cases of violence against Muslim women as a female fight against

¹⁵⁵ "Delo po obvineniiu Agaverdiev Abdulla Aga ogli po stat'e 70 UK AzSSR —Terroristicheskii akt, ubiistve svoei zheny na pochve raskreposhcheniia," (June 21, 1932–October 4, 1932) ARDA f. 917, o. 3, d. 322, l. 94.

¹⁵⁶A. Karaev, "Rezoliutsiia prezidiuma TsK AKPb po sostoianiiu massovoi, agitatsionnoi i kul'traby v Azerbaidzhane za 1927 god," (5 March 1928) RGASPI f. 17, op. 67, d. 410, l. 120.

enslavement imposed by the wealthy and the clergy, along with a female desire to gain economic and social independence.¹⁵⁷

As a result, in 1928, attacks on unveiled and politically active women became legally defined as counter-revolutionary acts: to undermine the Soviet state's program for women's liberation, and to deter Muslim women from allying themselves with the government. In the summer of 1929, the Azerbaijani government announced that the murder of an unveiled and political female activist would be considered an act of terrorism against the Soviet power in accordance with Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the AzSSR, which deserved a death sentence.¹⁵⁸ Party and state officials declared that they would provide financial support for victims' families and hold public trials for those found guilty of counter-revolutionary activity. State officials, aiming to put an end to these crimes and to address women's fear of facing the accused in the courts, announced that the new law would consider even anonymous claims to protect women from violence and harassment. The need to protect women even at the Soviet court came from the problem that Kadyrbekova began to voice since 1929. She expressed concerns about an increased level of opposition to gender reforms encountered not only from so-called class enemies but also from male Communists at the local and republican centres on whom the Party and *Zhenotdel* had to rely.¹⁵⁹ This opposition was a direct outcome of the official state program of the mid-1920s, when many Azeri men joined the Communist Party after Lenin's Call, *Leninskii prizyv*.

¹⁵⁷ Safi, "Jenaiet gurbani," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2 (1923): 23–25; F. Hadji zade, "Erarvad," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 9 (1924): 11_12; Simurg, "Azadlig uchun jinaiet," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10–11 (1927): 68_71; "Turk gadinlara jolunu kesme," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8 (1929): 17.

¹⁵⁸ "Ukaz Narodnogo Komissara Ustitsii I Prokurora respublikii tov. Vlibekova," (January 30, 1929) ARDA f. 379, o. 6, d. 126, ll. 7–8.

¹⁵⁹ Kadyrbekova, "Stenogramma zasedania Vsesoiuznykh kursov vostochnykh politprosvettrabotnikov, vechernee," (18 June 1929) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 237, ll. 6–7.

The Aftermath of the Soviet Gender Reforms, 1930 - 1939

In Azerbaijan, Party membership increased rapidly in 1924, after Lenin's Call, *Leninskii prizyv*, and new members obtained extraordinarily little training. Lenin's Call aimed to bring to the Communist Party new members from non-Slavic populations as part of the *korenizatsiia* [indigenization] policy that elevated the social status of the titular ethnic groups and created ethnic a political elite.¹⁶⁰ In June of 1923, there were 6,857 Communists, mostly of Slavic, Armenian, and Jewish origin, in the republic. In 1924, central Moscow officials introduced the official quota of a thirty-five percent increase in members of Muslim Azeri origin in Baku alone. As a result, in November 1924, there were 2,337 new members of Azeri ethnicity; forty percent of them were illiterate. The so-called *vydvizhentsi*, young specialists, nurtured within the Soviet system, replaced the members of the old intelligentsia and politicians.¹⁶¹

In 1927, only thirty-seven people with a university education and 267 with secondary education degrees gained before the Revolution remained among 27,058 Party members and candidates as compared with 1,000 in 1921.¹⁶² This was a direct outcome of the Communist Party policy. In 1921, the Party organized forty courses in Azerbaijan alone that aimed to prepare 237 future executive officers, including fifteen women.¹⁶³ By 1924, the number of the new political elite of Azeri origin had increased from 16.8% to 60% among all state bureaucrats.¹⁶⁴ In March 1926, TsIK AzCPb passed a special directive that required annual reporting on native

¹⁶⁰ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 10, 134–135.

¹⁶¹ *Rezoluitsii IV Plenuma BK AzKPb (7–10 May 1928)*, (Baku, 1928), 6.

¹⁶² *Vsesouiznaia partinaia perepis' 1927*, Sbornik materialov. 8 vols. (Moscow, 1927), v:7, 54. The official Party census of January the 10, 1927, presented these numbers within 1.125 million Party members all over the Soviet Union.

¹⁶³ *Kommunist*, 1921, December 8.

¹⁶⁴ *Otchetnye materialy BK AzKPb k XIII partconferentsii (26 April–4 May 1924)*, (Baku, 1924), 25.

vydvizhentsi's promotions, emphasizing this as a state priority.¹⁶⁵ By, 1930, the political activists who emerged in the early years of Bolshevik rule, and particularly those whose worldview was formed by the old-Imperial gender discourse, had been gradually replaced by the new generation of Azeri Communists.

Vydvizhentsi often were men who joined the Party for very trivial reasons, had a limited understanding of Communist ideology, were illiterate, and were not enthusiastic enough to cut all ties with local customs. While only the Party functionaries of the old cohort were zealous Communists and sincerely supported the gender reforms, the new recruits often undermined emancipation by opposing women's work in village soviets, and strove to stop gender reforms and women's participation in land redistribution.¹⁶⁶ These *vydvizhentsi* from the "Lenin's Call" generation used different methods to divert native women from Soviet reforms. One of these methods was to spread rumors that the *Zhenotdel* pressed Muslim women to engage in sexual relations. In fact, many of these male officials were themselves responsible for such deeds.

Tseitlin, the Azerbaijani *Zhenotdel*'s executive worker, complained about male Communists who aimed to engage their female co-workers in sexual relationships. *Zhenotdel* officials stressed that such "comrades" damaged all achievements and the entire idea of female emancipation.¹⁶⁷ They argued that local Muslim men must not work among women due to their inclination to see in every working woman an object of sexual desire. The *Sharg Gadini* column *Noksanlara Atesh, Fire at the Misconducts*, warned about legal penalties for harassment of women

¹⁶⁵ *Bulliten BK AzKPb*. 1926, v. 3–4, 5.

¹⁶⁶ Tsirul', "Svodka informatsionnogo otdela TsK VKPb. Itogi raboty delegatskikh sobranii za 1927-1928," (No date) RGASPI f.17. op. 32, d. 115, ll. 42–43.

¹⁶⁷ Tseitlin, "Tret'e zasedanie kraevogo soveshchania zaveduiushchikh Zhenotdelami Kavkazskikh respublik," (4 October 1927) RGASPI f. 64, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 111–112.

in the workplace. The journal exposed those who harassed women and stressed that the Soviet courts stood at the guard of the female honor and rights.¹⁶⁸

However, while *Zhenotdel* and *Sharg Gadini* officials made it clear that all abusers would be denounced publicly and punished by Soviet law and courts, the Soviet government stopped supporting the *Zhenotdel*. In 1930, the Soviet authority closed the All-Union *Zhenotdel* stating that the women's agency had become separate from the proletariat.¹⁶⁹ In 1930, Soviet leaders also closed the republican branches in Azerbaijan because, allegedly, they had fulfilled their mission of integrating Muslim women into socialism. Welfare work and job and educational training among women became the task of the various government departments.¹⁷⁰ Azeri *Zhenotdel* female activists lost their government positions, being accused of "deviation from the Party line" and nationalism.

New political leaders emerged in the mid-1920s, accused Kh. Shabanova-Karaeva, Kh. Azizbekova, A. Sultanova, G. Kadyrbekova, and other activists from the native *Zhenotdel* of money laundering, sheltering of class enemies, ties to the Musavat, and corrupting the idea of Muslim women's emancipation.¹⁷¹ As discussed elsewhere, there is no information about the government and Prosecutor Office bureaucrats' arguments or the implemented procedures for convicting Azeri female Communists as "enemies of the people." The State Archive for the Political Documents of the President's Office of Azerbaijan Republic [Azerbaijan Respublikasi Prezidentin Ishler Idaresinin Siyasi Senedler Arkhivi] that possesses all documentation regarding

¹⁶⁸ Xasaiet, "Turk gadinlar kollektiv teserrufatlarında," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 6 (1929): 2; Imanzade, "Naxchivan olkasinde medeni hujum," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7 (1929): 16; "Socialism jarish nedir ve ne djur duzeldilmelidir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10 (1929): 16–17.

¹⁶⁹ Atamaglanova and Rakhmeeva, "Tret'e zasedanie soveshchaniia azerbaidzanskikh rabotnits i krest'ianok" (29 September 1929) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 231, ll. 13-14, 19–20; "Predesedateliu komissii TsKK VKP(b) tov. Kakovykhinu," (Top secret) (August 1928) GARF f. 374, op. 27, d. 1821, ll. 37–40.

¹⁷⁰ A. Artiukhina, "Zhenrabotu vesti vsei partiiei v tselom," *Kommunistka*, no. 2–3 (February 1930): 6–10.

¹⁷¹ "Perepiska Azerbaidzhanskogo OGPU o sostoianii partiinoi i Sovetskoi raboty v Azerbaidzhane," (September 1928–March 1929) f. 374, o. 27, d. 1821, ll. 20–31.

Azerbaijani Communists who perished during the time of the Stalinist repressions, considering them “Top Secret,” denies access to researchers and the general public. However, while working at the State Archive of the Russian Federation, GARF, in Moscow, I found one document that illustrates the character of this state-run campaign against Azeri female Communists.



Figure 33. Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva, Baku, 1925. AAKFD photo.

The anonymous collective letter from a group of Azeri-native proletarian students from several Moscow universities to the Chair of TsIK Emel’ian Yaroslavsky denounced the harmful role of Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva in the process of building socialism in Azerbaijan. The authors of this anonymous letter called Shabanova-Karaeva, a key figure in the Azeri *Zhenotdel* and the leader of The Ali Bairamov Club from its very first day, “a masked enemy” who sheltered class enemies because of her bourgeois origin. They stated that her close ties with people from her years at the *Tagiev school* and connection with the old-Imperial intellectuals and Musavatists heavily affected the worldview of the leading Communist Ali Gaydar Karaev and were responsible for his deviation from the Party line. They also accused Shabanova-Karaeva of frivolous behavior with young male students, comparing her to the Russian Empress Catherine the Great, known for having

young male favorites. They blamed her for converting the Baku Medical School, where she held a teaching position, into a personal brothel. Furthermore, they condemned her for petitioning and bribing Azeri officers from the republican Prosecutor's office to save her Musavatist friends from Soviet justice.¹⁷² This anonymous letter shows that the new builders of socialist Azerbaijan employed both political and anti-feminine discourse for intimidation that led to the arrest and death of the majority of Azeri female Communists like Karaeva-Shabanova and her husband Ali Gaydar Karaev.

Khavar Shabanova-Karaeva (1901–1959) was a graduate of the *Tagiev school* and the Medical Academy in Moscow. She became a member of the Communist Party in 1919. To escape arrest and execution by the Musavatists, she emigrated to Bolshevik Russia Astrakhan', along with Ayna Sultanova and others, and returned only after the Sovietization of Azerbaijan in 1920. She held several positions at the Azeri *Zhenotdel* and the journal *Sharg Gadini*. Being a doctor, a gynecologist, she was also a chief of the Communist Party branch for Medical Specialists. From 1929, Karaeva was under investigation for her alleged connections to Musavatists. From her final arrest in 1937 until 1954, she was a detainee at the Moscow *Butirka* prison and at several GULAG camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Her husband, Ali Gaydar Karaev (1896–1938), did not escape the fate of all old Bolsheviks. Karaev was born in Shamakhi city to the family of a well-off merchant. He received a degree in engineering from the Russian Polytechnic Universities in Kharkov and Novorossiysk. Beginning in 1913, he published articles in the journal *Molla Nasreddin*, where he argued for societal transformation through the elimination of common illiteracy and by granting women liberties. Between 1916–1919, he was a member of the Social-Democratic Party, *Menshevik*. In 1919, he joined the Communist Party, and became an active

¹⁷² "Pis'mo tov. Yaroslavskomu ot gruppy studentov Azerbaidzhantsev goroda Moskvy," (No date, 1929) GARF f. 374, op. 27, d. 1822, ll. 28–30.

politician and a government leader. Between 1920 and 1929, he held many high-ranked positions such as Commissar of Justice, Commissar of Labor, and Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs. From 1920–1924, he was chief editor of the newspaper *Kommunist*. In the 1930s, he was a Second Secretary of the Transcaucasia Committee. Karaev was executed in April 1938, as an “enemy of the people” who plotted against the Soviet power.¹⁷³

Debates on methods of Muslim women’s emancipation performed by Azeri female Communists and other gender reformers of the old cohort became cornerstone arguments to accuse them in bourgeoisie elitism that never separated religion from society and, thus, did not result in the total abolition of gender segregation and veiling.¹⁷⁴ The central officials also blamed Azerbaijani gender reformers for losing their perspective on women’s liberation and distracting attention from more important matters, like the enrolment of women into the workforce and promoting class identity. As a result, the central state officials declared they would close all clubs for Muslim women’s emancipation. By 1936, the number of clubs for Muslim women had declined from forty-two to twenty-eight across the republic, becoming community centres for women of all nationalities.¹⁷⁵ In 1938, the government closed all female clubs, converting them into recreational centres open to people of both genders regardless of nationality. The Ali Bairamov Club became the civil registry office, ZAGS, under the name *Saadat Saraii, The Palace of Happiness*.

¹⁷³ E. Ismailov, *Istoria bol’shogo terrora v Azerbaidzhane* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2015), 238–142; P. Dzhangirov, *Pravda o “Dele Karaeva” Belye piatna nashei istorii* (Baku: Azerneshr, 1991), 149–151.

¹⁷⁴ N. Torskaia, “Oshibki v Zhenrabote Azerbaidzhana,” *Kommunistka*, no. 17–18 (September 1929): 43–48; S. Smidovich, “Chistka partii i zhenotdely,” *Kommunistka*, no. 7 (June–July 1929): 24–29; *Politika partii v natsional’nom voprose*, Sbornik materialov, (Baku, 1928), 36.

¹⁷⁵ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR,” (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l.40.

In 1935, the Soviet government introduced the new Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic, significantly lowering the terms of prosecution for those who committed crimes against women in the process of emancipation. Article 119 prescribed a maximum of five years for practicing polygyny. Article 120 imposed three years for marriage on minors. Article 121 set five years as the punishment for physical abuse of women who wished to work or study. Article 173 ordered a maximum of ten years of imprisonment for the murder of political and social women. Article 189 prescribed a maximum of three years for those who forced women into marriage. Article 190 set two years as the punishment for those who paid and received bride-money, *kalym*. The new Criminal Code eliminated capital punishment as a measure against crimes towards Muslim women on the road to emancipation. However, the Soviet Criminal Code still continued to practice the death sentence to those individuals who committed crimes against the socialist state. Thus, the government stopped considering the murder of unveiled and political female activists as acts of terrorism against Soviet power, judging them as “crimes of everyday life.”

As a result, the number of abuse cases toward Azeri women and girls significantly increased. In 1936, in Baku alone, there were 178 acts of female self-immolation (the facts never known before), 391 acts of rape, 190 cases of paying *kalym*, 190 abductions of women, 188 marriages by coercion, 201 instances of refusal to pay alimony, and 119 examples of polygyny.¹⁷⁶ Reports from the regions revealed cases of legal injustice, along with incidents of underage marriages and polygyny. In Lenkoran region, a teacher raped his 15-year-old female student and, bribing the local prosecutors, escaped a sentence. This fact kept many families from sending their daughters to school.¹⁷⁷ In Barda region alone, seven men married young girls aged from ten to

¹⁷⁶ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR.” (February 5-May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l. 31.

¹⁷⁷ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR.” (February 5-May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l. 12.

fifteen and were sentenced to four years, in accordance with Articles 193 and 195 of the Criminal Code of AzSSR for marriage to minors, although they did not serve their terms fully.¹⁷⁸ In Kuba region, the report indicates that thirteen underaged girls, from ten to fourteen years of age, were married. The document also reveals that fourteen men had more than three or four wives.¹⁷⁹

The official report, which summarized the work of the Republican Prosecutor's Office, also stated that those men who harassed Muslim women in their pursuit of liberation or violated the Soviet Code on Marriage and Family could now pay fines or be sentenced to conditional terms without imprisonment. The data shows that in Baku alone, fifty men who were married to underaged girls and were in polygynous unions paid fines, from one hundred to three hundred rubles; thirteen men received conditional sentences; and twenty-four men were exonerated, all of whom continued to live in those unions. The protocol emphasized that such minor terms of punishment were the direct result of the corruption of legal organs that were closely tied to the new cohort of Azeri Communists, so-called *vydvizhentsi*. The authors of this protocol stressed the need to investigate their true devotion to Communism.¹⁸⁰

The new political cohort used the official positions at their service, continuing patriarchal practices such as *kalym*, polygyny, and marriages to minors, which the first generation of Azeri reformers struggled to eliminate. The Record of the Prosecutor's Office for the period of August 1935–May 1936 revealed such examples: regional Communist Gamid Samadov was going to marry to eight-year-old Mesme Ismail qizi from Kazakh region, paying her parents five hundred rubles, three sheep, fifteen kilograms of rice, ten kilograms of sugar, and five dresses. In

¹⁷⁸ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR.” (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l. 2.

¹⁷⁹ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR,” (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l. 6.

¹⁸⁰ “Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR,” (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, ll. 90–92.

Nakhichevan region, a highly ranked official named K. Abdulla bribed a school vice-principal with sixty rubles, thirty-two kilograms of grapes and forty-eight kilograms of cheese to declare that his nine-year-old daughter was deaf, and thus unable to study at school. In reality, he married her to Churli Aliyev, a local politician. In Massali region, an unnamed local Party executive of thirty-five married an eight-year-old orphan girl. Overall, this official record indicated that between August 1935 and May 1936, there were sixty reported cases of violations of the Civil Code on Marriage and Family exclusively by the regional Party and government functionaries.¹⁸¹ The new Party discourse that positioned class interests over gender interests by closing the *Zhenotdel*, the agency that controlled the implementation of reforms in Muslim women's liberation, led to a situation where women did not have any female representatives at the various Party and government levels to defend their rights.¹⁸²

Also, in 1936, the government changed the rhetoric defining crimes against Muslim women's emancipation. The official report from the Presidium AzTsik stated that cases of murder of emancipated women could be committed by unenlightened male individuals of all nationalities and towards women of any ethnic background. For this first time, this official report placed rapists and murderers of Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Azeri origin on one line, in this way illustrating that criminality and backwardness were no longer ascribed only to male Muslim Azeris.¹⁸³ This new official discourse was an important part of the Party's new program on gender reform. Party officials stopped distinguishing "culturally advanced" European women from "backward" Azeri Muslim women. Government officials began to promote the image of

¹⁸¹ "Dokladnaia zapiska v prokuraturu AzSSR," (August 1935–May 1936) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 1141, ll. 40–45.

¹⁸² "Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR," (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, l. 95.

¹⁸³ "Postanovlenie Presidiuma AzTsik o sostoianii raboty po raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchin v AzSSR," (February 5–May 17, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o. 18. d. 38, ll. 35–38.

Azerbaijani women and stopped describing the local female population as Muslim and Azeri Turkic. In this way, they emphasized that Azeri women were no longer part of the general group of oriental women.¹⁸⁴ The culmination of these changes came in 1938 with the official designation of Azeris as Azerbaijanis, Azeri Muslim women as Azerbaijani women, and the renaming of the journal *Sharg Gadini* to *Azerbaijan Gadini*, inscribing in this way that womanhood became integrated into the process of nation-building. The leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union declared that they achieved their agenda to emancipate Muslim women. Thus, as new citizens, women became as integral as men to the “ethnic republics,” since the Soviet state and the Communist Party turned the titular nationalities across the Soviet Union into the active actors in building a socialist national entity.¹⁸⁵ The new Soviet gender policy of 1930–39 merged gender and ethnicity in the creation of a nation state within Republic of Azerbaijan.

In conclusion, in the mid-1920s, Azeri leftists welcomed Soviet legal regulations as an important tool to overthrow patriarchal traditions and customs, a program that they failed to achieve during the periods of Imperial and Musavatist rule. This political strategy allowed them to focus on societal modernization by participating in the new regime. While some had been Communists since the early 1910s, many other Azeri intellectuals and politicians transformed themselves into Communists in order to have the right to speak in the name of their Muslim community. By installing themselves as the new political and cultural elite, in opposition to the old cultural community leaders and Russian colonial authority, they were united in one mission: to modernize society. Even though native Communists propagandized the official doctrine

¹⁸⁴ Shaburova, “Stenogramma soveshchaniia chlenov VTsK i TsK SSSR. Zasedanie vtoroe,” (January 27–29, 1933) GARF f. 3316, op. 42, d. 187, ll. 70–73.

¹⁸⁵ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 155, 357.

defending working class interests, they also revived the old-Imperial discourse to benefit the whole Azeri community, *millat*, through mass education and women's emancipation.

Modern Western and Azeri historians debate the devotion of Azeri leftists to the Soviet regime, neglecting the fact that attractive Bolshevik revolutionary rhetoric put an end to religious radicalism and Russian Imperial colonial policies. These intellectuals, such as Dzh. Mamedkulizade, the Bairamalibekovs, Y. Vezirov, Sh. Efendiieva, and others, welcomed Bolshevik power, believing they would achieve their idea of modernization under the new power. They were also attracted to the new state programs because Azeri Communists including A. Sultanova, G. Musabekov, A. Karaev, G. Kadyrbekova, G. Guliyev, M. Efendiev, and many others (although not the Russian outsiders), were the leading executives of Bolshevik programs in the new republic.

In the 1920s, the central role in political and particularly cultural life belonged to the Azeri Communists and early sovietized Azerbaijani Imperial reformers. They aimed to make their *millat* modern and secular, with them as a new elite. The Azeri reformers compared themselves to fellow modernists in Republican Turkey, prompting new laws to modernize Azeri society rapidly. Declaring the incompatibility of patriarchal practices and religion with modernity they, like their Turkish counterparts, pronounced veiling and seclusion as the main obstacles on the road to the emancipation of Muslim women. To justify their campaign for rapid *chadra* abolition, Azeri native politicians demanded that Moscow introduce an official decree for unveiling as a measure to proceed with a reform to support and defend those Muslim women who welcomed the political and cultural reformation. This Azeri-initiated crusade against veiling became the subject of conflict with the central Party and government authorities.

The pace of the anti-religious campaign was another subject of hot debate among the Azeri and central government and Party officials. In their eagerness to end the power of *ulama* and *Sharia*, the Azeri government and Party executives confiscated spiritual centres and arrested Islamic priests in such an aggressive manner that the Moscow authorities, already terrified by the scale of resistance to Soviet reform in Uzbekistan, disapproved of the Azeri-style anti-religious crusade. Moscow-based officials instructed local Communists to decelerate the pace of cultural and religious reforms, arguing that the issues of religion and veiling were one part of the whole Soviet politics in the Muslim East and required an extremely delicate approach. As a result, the Azeri model of modernity was short-lived, and did not fit into the Stalinist political and economic model of societal transformation initiated in 1929.

Starting in 1929, the Stalinist strategy of industrialization ascribed Soviet women, regardless of their cultural background, to new economic and social roles. The massive introduction of a female workforce into industry required new ideology and new government institutions to control Soviet women. The new patterns of the Stalinist government authority and the introduction of the rapid industrialization of the Soviet state accompanied by the collectivization of agriculture transformed Muslim women's roles as part of these broader political and economic changes. Later, the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel*, the abolition of the clubs and mobile courts, and the eradication of strong regulations to punish abusers left Muslim women without any female representatives at the various Party and government levels to defend their rights and societal achievements.

Subsequently, the degree of hostility against Azeri women soared as a direct outcome of the Communist Party program that prioritized state interests over gender interests. Stalinist Party politics replaced egalitarian and libertarian Bolshevism, represented by the cohort of old

Communists, with new political and economic priorities exercised by a new generation of Party recruits, *vydvizhentsi*. The vast expansion of the Party membership in the mid-1920s altered the composition of the Communist Party and the government. The new recruits were from various social origins and had quite different political ambitions. *Vydvizhentsi* brought more traditional patterns of behavior and viewpoints on women's societal roles. As a result, the old Bolshevik concept of the liberating fundamentals of female emancipation receded, giving way to economic and political matters.

Chapter Six

The Sky is Not a Limit

We are born to realize a dream into reality,
To overcome long distances and space.
Our mind gave us steel wings as hands.
Our heart is a flaming engine.
Always higher, higher, and higher!
*March of the Soviet Aviators.*¹

In the 1920s, the Soviet government and Communist Party leaders initiated reforms to modernize traditional Muslim society in Azerbaijan. In the early 1920s, the Azeri Soviet reformers aimed to change women's public position, one that had been shaped by Islamic law and the long-established practices that tolerated marriages on minors, polygyny, bride price, and veiling. In the late 1920s, the Soviet regime introduced the new paradigm of women's equality with men, emphasizing the new roles of Muslim women as builders and defenders of the socialist motherland. In the period between two world wars, the Soviet modernization project was similar to the programs that several other states launched to transform their societies. As Stephen Kotkin states: "each major country – since none relinquished its great power ambitions – became involved in a competition for articulating a mass-based version of modernity, which gave a new impetus and form to its geopolitical rivalries."²

The governments of countries neighboring Soviet Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran, also undertook reforms to change Muslim women's societal roles as an integral part of their cultural modernization. Like in the Soviet Muslim East, political leaders native to both countries claimed

¹ *March of the Soviet Aviators*, 1923. Music by Iu. A. Khait. Lyrics by P. D. German. (translation is mine).

² Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no.1 (2001): 111–164. 114.

that female illiteracy and patriarchal traditions were the main markers of their communities' backwardness. To achieve cultural, economic, and political prestige in a competitive world, the states proposed to establish modern cultural settings built by all citizens regardless of gender. In this way, by declaring the campaign to defeat backward traditions, those governments changed women's roles for the benefit of a new society.

In this chapter, I argue that in the interwar period it was a state, rather than the enlightened middle class that defined the course of gender reformation. This chapter asserts that the position of women in Muslim societies in the 1930s should be studied as political projects of contemporary states and of their historical evolutions. This part of the study provides a comparative analysis of governments' reforms and their influence on women's lives in Soviet Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran. I demonstrate that Soviet policies on changing Muslim women's status during the interwar years were not unique.

This chapter examines programs created by the governments of Iran and Turkey to destroy traditional patriarchal institutions and the legal authority of Islam in their pursuit of modernity. I also argue that in these three culturally, ethnically, and linguistically linked countries, regardless of their political regimes, the project to advance Muslim women to aviation making them the combat pilots, emerged as the highest point of Muslim women's emancipation. Thus, this chapter investigates the state-run campaigns for Muslim women's introduction into industry and military service as the central mechanisms in making the "New Woman of the modern East."

Making the Modern Woman in Republican Turkey

In the 1920s, two Middle Eastern states, Turkey and Iran, initiated movements toward modernity. Turkish and Iranian political leaders choose the Western style of modernity, which was different from the transformative programs of other nation states in Africa and Asia that had a record of European colonialism in their territories. As Partha Chatterjee points out, post-colonial states tried to be different from that which was traditional as well as unique from that which was Western. In post-colonial countries, reformers aimed to transform old culture into something modern but not Western, linking the latter to colonial power.³ Since both Turkey and Iran escaped the experience of being colonial subjects, native reformers welcomed Western culture, associating it with progress and modernity.

In 1793, Ottoman sultans and a group of high-ranked bureaucrats initiated the cultural reforms of Westernization, aiming to modernize their society. From the mid-1860s, in the Ottoman empire, the state which preceded republican Turkey, the important part of societal modernization were women's reforms, based on the twin pillars of education and law. The first steps towards women's education began in 1858 with the establishment of several primary schools for girls in Istanbul. In 1863, Imperial officials founded a college for the training of women's teachers in the same city. During the period of constitutional monarchy, 1908–1922, male intellectuals and politicians voiced their thoughts about the need to improve the level of women's education and public activity.⁴ In 1911, the Ottoman government established the first public institution to train

³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 96–101.

female civil servants. In 1914, the Istanbul University and the Advanced School for Commerce opened their doors to women.⁵

The events of First World War and the influx of Muslim refugees from the former Ottoman territories to the Balkans significantly changed Turkish women's societal roles. Turkish women found new roles in their communities: elite women established several philanthropic associations to relieve war hardships for those in need, while women from the lower class found employment in food and ammunition industries. Along with this, Turkish women began to work in hospitals, banks, and municipal administrations. The downfall of the Ottoman empire in 1919, the occupation of Istanbul by British troops, and the raids by Greek soldiers in the Mediterranean provinces, stimulated the rise of Turkish women's political activity.⁶ Features of this process of advancement of Muslim women in politics resemble women's political activism in Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, as discussed elsewhere, Azeri women protested against the British and Bolshevik occupations and Armenian aggression of 1918–1920. They also became broadly involved in war relief programs, the press, and municipal or central administrations to support their reformist governments.⁷ In both countries, the well-known female writers and educators of that period, Shafiga Efendiieva, Sara Talishinskaia, Ayna Sultanova, and Dzheiran Bairamova from Azerbaijan, and Turkish female intellectuals such as Halide Edib, Nezihe Muhiddin, and Nakiye Elgun, became the leaders in Muslim women's struggle for legal and societal equalities.

In 1917, Young Turk officials introducing the first Family Law Code nevertheless approved the old *Sharia* regulations that allowed marriage at age nine for girls and age ten for boys

⁵ Nikki R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 82.

⁶ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 83.

⁷ Shafiga Efendiieva, *Gadin sechkisi*. *Achiq sioz* 593, October 20, 1917; *Sehki va gadinlar*. *Achiq sioz* 598, October 26, 1917; *Yol esnasında giorduklerim*. *Azerbaijan*, 170, May 1, 1919; D. Bairamova, *Moi Vospominaniia* (Lichnyi fond D. Bairamovoi) (March 3, 1972) ARDA f. 2734, o. 2, d. 7, l. 85; Gulara Kadyrbekova, *Bir Saraiin Tarikhi* (Azerbaijan Devlet Neshriyat, 1936), 47–48.

and maintained polygyny. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the first President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1923–1938), and his supporters totally eliminated all religious and traditional cultural institutions and practices.⁸ Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), the founder of the official ideology, *Avropalilik va Modernlik*, proclaimed European-style Modernism that combined the egalitarian principles of European democracy with ancient Turkic nomadic culture.⁹ He was “an architect” of Turkish nationalism and instrumental in establishing the Kemalist nationalist discourse to sever Turkish people from their Ottoman past and create bonds with a pre-Islamic, Central Asian Turkish history. Gökalp argued that ancient Turks were both democratic and feminist. The power of *khagan*, king, and *khatun*, queen, were equal. Turkic women were warriors, governors, and ambassadors. Turks had no veil, polygyny, or gender segregation.¹⁰ This discourse allowed the republican government to claim that emancipating Muslim women through the introduction of Western cultural values would be a return to genuine Turkic traditions.

In 1925, to modernize society, Atatürk’s government launched campaigns to eliminate traditional dress, promoting European-style garb for both men and women. The first law, issued in the same year, banned the *fez* and male religious wear, such as the turban and robe, outside of mosques. This first regulation regarding state control over male bodies preceded government authority over women’s bodies. Despite the promotion of the image of the modern republican woman as unveiled and in European attire, the first official decree that outlawed veiling and so-called *Islamic dress*, a long and loose dress that covered neck and head, came to life only in 1935.¹¹

During the reformatory years of the 1920s and 1930s, Atatürk and his supporters promoted

⁸ Nermin Abadan-Unat, “The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women,” in *Women in Middle East: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki R. Kiddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 177–178.

⁹ Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 120–127.

¹⁰ Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, 130–135.

¹¹ Zehra Arat, “Kemalism and Turkish Women,” *Women and Politics* 14, no. 4 (1994): 62–63.

unveiling less radically than the Azeri reformers by propagandizing it only with personal examples. They presented their unveiled female family members to the general public and demanded removal of face covering only from female students and government employees. Halide Edib Adivar, Nezihe Muhiddin, and Atatürk's adopted daughters were the emissaries of the new cultural norms. This reformation of dress as the visual symbol of societal backwardness was remarkably different from that promoted in Azerbaijan. In the Soviet republic, reorganizers began the reformation of dress first with women, and only later proceeded to men's attire.

In Azerbaijan, *chadra* became a symbol of women's submissiveness and ignorance from the first days of Bolshevik progress. The Party and *Zhenotdel* leaders organized mass demonstrations and meetings to appeal to the masses for veil removal. Government officials kept a record of unveiled women and punished those who opposed unveiling. It is important to admit that Soviet Azeri reformers referred to Atatürk's reform to legitimize rapid *chadra* and *papakh* abolition, in opposition to the directives sent from Moscow that demanded graduality. This reference shows the existence of a mutual interest among the intellectual and political elite of both Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan. Soviet Moscow-based officials also paid attention to Atatürk's gender reforms. In particular, the leaders of the central *Zhenotdel* compared Soviet achievements with Turkish ones stressing the positive role of gender segregated clubs, *artel's*, and mobile courts in the success of Soviet Muslim women's liberation from the patriarchy.¹² In 1923, the Turkish political leader, Atatürk, interested in the Soviet model of societal modernization, sent his emissaries to the Soviet Union. In one of the Soviet resolutions, Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin advised the Commissar of Enlightenment Lunacharskii to provide maximum assistance to the Turkish delegates. The Soviet executive stressed the need to explain to Atatürk's emissaries

¹² "Protokol zasedaniia komissii po raskrepushcheniiu zhenshin Vostoka," (April 30, 1923) RGASPI f. 17, o. 10, d. 94, l. 116.

that the Soviet program for gender transformation relied on the legal equality of Soviet men and women, the citizens of the modern and secular state.¹³

In March 1924, to transform Turkish women from passive subjects into active citizens of the modern state, republican leaders initiated the reformation of education. The Turkish republican government issued two new laws. The first legal act abolished the Ottoman *Caliphate*, an administrative-spiritual institute under the leadership of the Islamic spiritual leader over the whole *Sunni* community. The second law required the closure of all religious educational institutions. This new law also announced the establishment of coeducational system.¹⁴ However, this reform advocating free and compulsory public schooling did not bring universal female literacy. According to Nermin Abadan-Unat, this government project neglected rural women and girls and was responsible for producing long-term consequences: the low literacy rate among the female population. By 1984, the literacy rate for women was 62.5 percent and 86.5 percent for men.¹⁵ While in Azerbaijan, because of Soviet educational reforms which targeted rural and nomadic women in particular, by 1980 the literacy rate for women was 99.8 percent and 99.9 percent for men.¹⁶ Abadan-Unat explains the limited nature of educational reform in Turkey as a direct result of an economic system that failed to remove “the clear discrepancies between town and village, class and region.”¹⁷ These differences were also responsible for the limited number of Turkish women who gained high education. Abadan-Unat points out that in 1928 alone, the total number

¹³ “Ot narcoma Inostrannykh Del tov. Chicherina Narkomu Prosveshcheniia tov. Lunacharskomu,” (March 13, 1923), RGASPI f. 17, o. 10, d. 94, l. 134.

¹⁴ Abadan-Unat, “The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women,” 179.

¹⁵ Abadan-Unat, “The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women,” 182.

¹⁶ Education and Literacy by Country at www.uis.unesco.org/country/AZ (accessed February 20, 2020).

¹⁷ Abadan-Unat, “The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women,” 182.

of female students at the universities was 441, compared to 3,477 male students.¹⁸ In Azerbaijan, in 1928, among 7,120 female students, 2,009 young women were of Azeri origin.¹⁹

To meet the demands of the modern civilization, in February 1926, the founding fathers of the Turkish republic adopted the slightly modified Swiss Civil Code that established state control over families. The new Civil Code determined the lowest age to enter a marital union to be seventeen for women and eighteen for men. It granted women equal rights in divorce and child custody. The Civil Code outlawed polygyny. However, reflecting traditional values, the Code affirmed the husband as the head of the family, as the main judge in choosing where to live, and as the authority in approving women's ambitions to study or work outside home.²⁰ Unlike Turkish women, from the early 1920s, Soviet Azeri women received legal status as equal in the family and society, except in performing heavy labor and in the right to have a menstrual and maternity leave. In Turkey, the Civil Code's regulations, which imposed man as the family leader, were revoked only in 1990 after a long struggle by Turkish feminists and feminist-socialists. According to Binnaz Toprak, Kemalist gender reforms emancipated but did not liberate Turkish women, because while gaining some civil and political rights, Turkish women nevertheless remained confined by communal norms and traditional customs that the state failed to eradicate completely.²¹

Several factors contributed to the limited success of gender reforms in republican Turkey. One of them was the sharp societal and economic division of Turkish society, especially in the rural areas of the Eastern provinces populated by Kurds, *Shia* Turks – Alevi, and Arabs. These

¹⁸ Abadan-Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women," 182–183.

¹⁹ "Otchet o provedenii postanovleniia komissii prezidiuma TsIK USSR o sostoianii zhenskogo obrazovaniia," (September 6, 1929–May 12, 1931) ARDA f. 57, o. 1, d. 700, ll. 7–8.

²⁰ Deniz A. Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflection on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987): 317–378.

²¹ Binnaz S. Toprak, "Religion and Turkish Women," in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 281–292.

military-agrarian peasant societies had relatively little integration with the economy, administration, and culture of the Ottoman empire and Kemalist republic.²² As Abadan-Unat states, only in the Western regions and urban centres were the reforms greeted positively by the local population.²³ The second factor was the absence of thorough and far-reaching government control over the reforms' development. In Azerbaijan, unlike in Turkey, the government and Communist Party strictly controlled the progress of Muslim women's societal transformation, making every man responsible for the success of Muslim women's emancipation. In particular, male members of the Communist Party and government officials had to set an example in advocating for the gender reforms and in treating Muslim women as equal, otherwise they would face strong criticism and punishment. In Turkey, only urban men close to the republican government encouraged their female family members to enter public life and abandon veil and traditional Islamic dress. Soviet government authorities, unlike Turkish officials, also went directly to villages to mobilize women, introducing gender-segregated literacy centres, clubs for Muslim women, and mobile courts to defend women.

In particular, agrarian reform and collectivization, which destroyed social boundaries emphasizing class belonging over gender, allowed the Soviet state and Communist Party to establish powerful control over the progress of gender reforms in patriarchal village communities. The omnipresence of the Soviet state in Azeri Muslim society can be seen in the methodically kept statistics that recorded the numbers of Muslim women involved in literacy clubs and political organizations. By making public the criminal cases for crimes committed against Muslim women

²² On the ethnic, religious, and cultural composition of the Ottoman empire and Republic of Turkey, see: Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); E. J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010); Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²³ Abadan-Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women," 188.

in family and society, the Soviet government stressed the seriousness of its intentions. According to Kamp, the Soviet tactic to record and penalize all violations towards Muslim women demonstrates the socialist state's authority and commitment to gender reforms.²⁴

In Azerbaijan, Soviet officials kept track of the statistic that revealed the number of those who resisted unveiling and continued to practice Islamic marriages on minors and bigamous unions approved by the Muslim clergy. In Turkey, statistical evidence about the number of cases of polygyny, underage marriages, forced veiling, and violations of women's rights in property inheritance is absent.²⁵ One strong indication that republican officials did not monitor the process of family reformation is their reaction to cases with recognition of so-called illegitimate children. As discussed, the Civil Code abolishing all *Sharia* guidelines on the family made legitimate only those marriages registered at civil government offices. However, the citizens of the republic continued to practice religious marriages. Consequently, by 1950, the state had to produce a series of amnesty laws to grant citizenship to the 7,724,419 children born in outlawed Islamic marriages.²⁶

The third factor responsible for the slow pace of gender reforms in Turkey was the republican government's refusal to give Turkish women the right to mobilize independently. In 1923, the first year of the republic, Atatürk disapproved of Nezihe Muhiddin and other women's agenda to establish a Women's People's Party, stating that its feminist program would compete with the Republican People's Party. Instead, the government advised women to form a Turkish Women's Union, controlled by the republican authority. In 1924, the Union's female leaders founded a journal, *Türk Kadın Yolu, The Path of the Turkish Woman*. In its eighteen issues, the

²⁴ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 72–73.

²⁵ Abadan-Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women," 188.

²⁶ Abadan-Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women," 188.

journal's editors demanded the introduction of women's political rights.²⁷ The official Republican People's Party ignored their demands. Instead, between 1924 and 1934, the government coordinating the Union's female leaders advised raising Turkish womanhood to the modern and experienced level of Western countries. Finally, in 1930, Turkish women received the right to vote in municipal elections. Starting in 1934, they could elect and be elected to the republican parliament, the Grand National Assembly.²⁸ Unlike Turkish women, Azeri women received the right to vote in 1917, when the Provisional Government, established in the aftermath of the February Revolution, granted all women of the Russian empire suffrage. The government of the ADR, 1918–1920, and the Bolshevik authorities, 1920–1991, upheld this right, and as previously discussed, Azeri women fully exercised it.

Along with this, many Azeri women, unlike their Turkish counterparts, enthusiastically cooperated with the ruling power, joining the *Zhenotdel*, the Women's Division of the Communist Party, 1920–1930. *Zhenotdel* became a women's agency that popularized, advocated for, and defended Muslim women's rights in social and political spheres within the framework of the Communist ideology. Azeri *Zhenotdel's* main agenda was to make Muslim women politically active by bringing them into Communist Party organizations. Nevertheless, close cooperation with the Communist women's department did not preserve Azeri feminist independence. In the early 1930s, Turkey and the Soviet Union, both one-party system states, stood in a similar position with regards to women's roles in modern society. Perceiving that *Zhenotdel* and the Women's Union had too much independence in the public realm, the governments of both countries closed the two agencies in 1930 and 1934, respectively. Thus, the discourse on women's new roles in republican

²⁷ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 83.

²⁸ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 84.

Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan, earlier or later, became subordinated to the state agenda rather than women's interests.

Making the Modern Woman in Royalist Iran

Iran's model of modernization, introduced by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925, aimed to create a centralized nation-state with an emphasis on modern education and Persian nationalist principles. This official ideology was responsible for the fact that successive Iranian governments of the twentieth century have avoided publishing demographic statistics on ethnic groups. The official discourse deflated the number of Turks in order to protect a clear Persian majority to claim cultural and linguistic dominance.²⁹ As Keddie points out, the "official figures greatly underestimate the size particularly of the largest groups, the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds."³⁰ In the pre-Pahlavi period, official Iranian sources from the 1850s reported that Turkic ethnic groups whose primary language was Azeri comprised one-third of Iran's population.³¹ Thus, despite the differences in state political organizations (monarchist Iran with strong anti-Communist politics and the Azerbaijani socialist republic under the Communist rulership), which were responsible for the limited interaction between the two countries, the fact that one-third of the Iranian population were Azeri Turks allows a comparative analysis of gender reforms in Iran and Soviet Azerbaijan.

²⁹ Please note that Iran's official name until 1935 was Persia. Modern Iranian demographic data states that 50 percent of the Iranian population is Persian while the remaining half is comprised of various ethnic minorities. G. T. Kurian argues that Azerbaijani comprised one-third of all Iranian citizens, nearly 27 million Azerbaijanis out of 80 million live in modern Iran. George Thomas Kurian, *Encyclopedia of the Third World* (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 3 vols., 2:869.

³⁰ Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 134.

³¹ Two factors suggest that the number of Azeris in Iran did not decline between the 1850s and the 1930s: first, the Iranian government never produced any kind of ethnic cleansing towards the Turkic people. Second, many Azeri Turks lived in agricultural regions or towns, and tended to have many children. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 12.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Iran underwent many political changes. In 1905, revolutionary activity against the absolute monarchy and demand for the introduction of a parliament and a constitution spread throughout Iran. In 1906, Nasreddin Shah Qajar granted the Constitution and the establishment of the parliament. In 1907 his son Mohamad Ali Mirza, a new Shah, abrogated it, and with the help of the British and Russian armies dissolved the parliament. The governments of the British and Russian empires preferred to control the marionette state. To have better control over Iran, the two empires divided the country into two zones: the Russians took control over the north, and the British zone was in the south of Iran. This division, and the Shah's betrayal of national interests, sparked a civil war in 1908. In 1909, the Shah abdicated. Between 1909 and 1911, there was a period of parliamentary rule. However, in 1911, Britain regained control again and installed a new Shah, Ahmad Shah Qajar. In the meantime, Russian military forces occupied the Iranian Azerbaijani province with its capital, Tabriz. This intervention into domestic affairs provoked Iranian nationalism fueled by strong anti-British and anti-Russian sentiments. Moreover, many Iranians welcomed Bolshevik ideology because of its promises of national self-determination and the end of imperialist colonialism.³²

In 1919, the Shah's ministers signed an unpopular Anglo-Iranian Treaty which would make Iran a protectorate. This gave rise to political opposition from Iranian nationalists and Communist leftists. In 1920, the Iranian Bolsheviks, represented mostly by Iranian-born Azeri Communists and those Iranians who became indoctrinated in Communism while working in Baku's oil fields, established a short-lived Bolshevik state in Gilan province. One year later, in 1921, with support from the British military and political elite, who preferred a unified government to disorder and Communist control, Colonel Reza Khan usurped power through a military coup. In 1925, the

³² Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8–34.

Iranian assembly deposed the last Shah from the Qajar dynasty. The same year, Reza Khan crowned himself Shah of the new dynasty, Pahlavi.³³

Reza Shah's first steps as a state leader were to centralize the country rather than to modernize it. Building a strong conscript army, he was able to put an end to tribal autonomy and separatist movements. He settled the nomadic tribes, imposed full control over the Parliament, and encouraged industrialization and construction of a united network of roads. By introducing a system of modern public schools and a secular system of social welfare, Reza Shah limited the power of religious leaders, *ulama*, who had traditionally controlled it. However, his break with religion was less radical than those initiated in republican Turkey and in Soviet Azerbaijan. In Iran, the *Shia* clerics, along with former tribal kings, strongly opposed modernization and centralization and still retained much authority over the Iranian population. However, various nationalist and feminist groups supported Reza Shah's revolutionizing projects.³⁴

In Iran, the history of the women's reformation began later than in the Ottoman empire and Russian Azerbaijan. In 1907, the Qajar government established the first public school for girls in Tehran, while in Istanbul, such a school had operated since 1858, and in Baku, since 1901. Ottoman authorities opened a Teaching Training College for women in 1870; in Baku it had functioned since 1913, while in Tehran it had only existed since 1918. Ottoman and Azeri women gained access to higher education in 1911. In Iran, women received this right only in 1936. Nevertheless, Iranian and Azeri women both established feminist periodicals in 1911, significantly later than their Ottoman counterparts, who had voiced their opinions in media since 1869. In Russian Azerbaijan, it was mostly tsarist authorities who opposed the establishment of independent public educational centres for Muslim girls and young women. In Iran, it was predominantly

³³ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 85.

³⁴ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 86.

religious authorities, rather than the government, who resisted modern female education and women's mobilization.³⁵ The majority of those male political and intellectual leaders who supported women's right to modern schooling were members of the Communist and Socialist Parties of Iran. In particular, in 1920, the political leaders of the short-lived Gilan Communist Republic promised political and social equality for women.³⁶

In 1911, Iran's women established women's newspapers, *Danesh, Knowledge*, and *Shokufeh, Blossom*, that advocated for modern education. In 1913, native women under the leadership of Maryam Amid Mozayen al-Saltaneh founded the Iranian Women's Society. In 1921, in Mashhad, female journalist Fakhr Afag Parsa issued a journal entitled *Jahan i-Zanan, Women's World*. The journal promoted the need for women's education and legal and societal equality with men. These demands provoked the burning of her house and abuse of her and her family by religious fanatics. Consequently, Fakhr Afag, like her female counterparts in Azerbaijan, Sh. Efendiieva, S. Akhundova, and others, had to flee to the capital to save her life. In 1923, after severe criticism from Islamic clerics and numerous threats to her life, Fakhr Afag closed the journal. Between 1922 and 1933, Qajar princess Mohtaram Eskandari, along with Fakhr Afag Parsa, Noor Hoda Manganeh, and Mastoreh Afshar, established the *Jamiiat e-Nisvan e-Vatan, Society of Patriotic Women*, which strove to increase women's roles in society. Its members, like their female associates in Turkey and Azerbaijan, provided care for orphan girls and food and clothing for women left without a spouse, and established schools for female commoners. Society members popularized their activity in the women's journal *Nisvan Vatan, Patriotic Woman*.³⁷ Reza Shah approved of this women's activity, stressing its positive influence on societal development.

³⁵ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 149.

³⁶ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 84.

³⁷ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in the Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102.

The official rhetoric declared that for the building of a modern and united Iran, women's roles as educated mothers and teachers of the nation were essential. From 1931, the state began to control women's autonomous activities.

In 1931, Reza Shah declared the Socialist, Communist, and Revival Parties illegal, the only parties that promised Iranian women legal, economic, and political equality with men.³⁸ Reza Shah's official anti-socialist and anti-Communist politics explains the absence of any links between the Pahlavi government and the Communist-ruled Soviet Union regarding gender and modernist reforms. However, Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey were sources of inspiration for Reza Shah in his politics to reform women. In 1934, he visited Turkey and was impressed with Atatürk's model of societal modernization. In particular, he credited the promotion of reforms to end patriarchal practices and their visual symbols, the veil and Islamic dress, with increasing women's public activity. In 1935, Reza Shah put an end to women's autonomy in political and social mobilization by subordinating all organizations to state control. He founded the Women's Centre under the leadership of his daughter, Shams Pahlavi, to prepare society for gender reorganization. He named this initiative to make Muslim women modern as *Women's Awakening*.³⁹

Shah defined the main aspects of Iranian women's transformation as the abolition of veiling and the introduction of women to modern education, industry, and civic services. In 1935, the state allowed women to gain higher education and introduced a midwifery school. From 1936, Iran's young female population received access to compulsory elementary and secondary education. In 1937, the government introduced a minimum age for marriage: fifteen for women and eighteen for men. The new Civil Code recognized only those marriages and divorces registered by the state.

³⁸ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 86.

³⁹ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 168–170.

However, Reza Shah proposed no new laws that would make women equal with men. Nevertheless, Iranian feminists welcomed this limited government program, believing that they could gradually attain long-awaited rights under strong state guardianship.

In January 1936, Reza Shah issued a decree that commanded the immediate unveiling of all women.⁴⁰ The state applied violence to enforce this law. In many urban centres, local policemen pulled the veil off women. These radical measures introduced by the Shah and performed by his zealous supporters provoked strong resistance from *Shia* religious leaders. The *ulama*-led opposition became responsible for a series of riots across the country. Many Iranian women considered unveiling a brutal imposition rather than a liberation and opposed it severely. The reforms were short-lived and came to an end in 1941 after the Shah's abdication. His admiration of Nazi ideology, his obsession to find the common "Aryan" roots between Iranians and Germans, and his strong support of Nazi Germany as an ally in the Middle East, provoked geopolitical crisis. In 1941, the British and Soviet governments, the most influential great powers in the region, aiming to destroy the German influence in Iran, forced Reza Shah to step down from the throne in favor of his son, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi (1941–1979).⁴¹ Starting in 1941, many political parties, ranging from the pro-Communist Tudeh to liberal and conservative organizations, became active again, promising to improve women's societal roles. Nevertheless, the most active political force became the Islamic *Shia* groups that demanded the termination of all previous gender reforms, and particularly insisted on the return of veiling. In 1979, they realized their goal with establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The limited success of gender reforms in Iran during the interwar years can be explained by one factor: the deep class and cultural divisions of Iranian society that Reza Shah, unlike the

⁴⁰ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 87.

⁴¹ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 88.

Soviet Azeri leaders, had no intention of eradicating. Only some urban middle and upper class Iranians welcomed the Shah's edicts to abandon traditional clothing, particularly the veil, to end patriarchal gender norms, and to accept the European way of living. Unlike Azeri social-political reforms, the Shah's government reforms did not reach the greater tribal, rural, and township people whose female populace remained completely untouched by state gender reorganization. The nomadic and rural women gained extraordinarily little from the reforms. Very few women entered schools, the nascent industry, or civil institutions.⁴²

Keddie states that Iran's model of modernization divided society by establishing "two cultures": the thin stratum of those who followed Westernization, and the broad stratum of rural and tribal commoners, who remained confined to the traditional ways of living regulated by the powerful *Shia ulama*.⁴³ Hence, the Iranian Shah regime, similar to that of the Turkey's republican government, initiated cultural transformation to modernize and strengthen its nation-state. The women of Iran and Turkey, with different degrees of involvement and government support, participated in nationalist movements to unify and modernize their independent states. In the meantime, in Soviet Azerbaijan, Azeri women remained confined to the all-Soviet program, participating in the creation of a multinational political entity that, since the late-1920s, tolerated little Azeri cultural independence.

⁴² Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 88.

⁴³ Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 87 - 88.

Stalinist Gender Discourse in Action

With the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, the Stalinist government aimed to transform the Soviet Union as quickly as possible into an industrialized and completely socialist state. The First Five-Year Plan, 1928–1932, emphasized the need to expand heavy industry and also called for the transformation of Soviet agriculture from predominantly individual farms into a system of large state collective farms. Soviet government officials believed that collectivization would increase agricultural productivity, providing much needed crops to feed the growing urban labor force. Along with this, collectivization was expected to free many peasants for industrial work in the cities, and to enable the Communist Party to expand its political authority over the remaining peasantry.

To expand Soviet industrial production, the authors of the Five-Year Plan recommended the intensification of women's participation in industrial areas. In 1928, the all-union government introduced quotas for women's employment in various industries in the South Caucasus. According to the plan, by 1932, at the end of the first Five-Year Plan, the number of women in light industry should have increased from 404,200 to 1,720,700. In the food industry, the quota required an increase of employed women from 26,900 to 148,500. The state demanded to raise the number of female workers in the chemical industry from 17,300 to 90,600.⁴⁴ In Azerbaijan, women's involvement in the various industrial fields was quite low, and the centre criticized the work of the local government for the slowness of the introduction of female labor into the socialist industrial sector.

⁴⁴ "Rezoliutsiia po dokladam Gosplana ob uchastii zhenschin v proizvodstve po 5-mu planu," (December 1931–November 1933) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 9, ll. 60–62.

According to the Report on the State Planned Economy of AzSSR, in 1928 alone, 41,260 women of unspecified ethnic background were employees of various industries. In particular, 18,965 women worked in the heavy, light, and oil industries, 2,475 served in trade, and 16,904 were employees of the educational, medical, and service spheres. The Moscow-based authors of the planned economy instructed the republican government to increase the number of women employed in the socialist industrial sector by 1932.⁴⁵ Along with this, the officials demanded that Azeri women be educated for occupations required in modern industry, particularly in engineering. As a result, in 1930 alone, two hundred forty three Azeri women became chemical engineers, forty graduated as civil engineers, and twenty-three worked as mechanical engineers.⁴⁶

Moscow officials also instructed the Azeri government to allocate 12 billion *rubles* from the local budget to industrial development.⁴⁷ While the Azeri government had to invest vast financial resources into heavy industry, Azeri women had to learn to survive in a time total deficit of goods and food, a result of the rapid construction of socialism. This period of product shortage is reflected in the journal *Sharg Gadini*. In the 1930s, the editors of *Sharg Gadini* gave advice on how to make new dresses from old men's and women's clothing for women and their families.⁴⁸ They taught female readers how to make substitutes for ink, toothpaste, laundry detergent, and soap from plants, charcoal ash, and potash. The editors also posted numerous recipes for dishes

⁴⁵ M. Efendiev, "O vnedrenii zhen truda v nar xozvo AzSSR v1932 godu," "Rezoliutsiia po dokladam Gosplana ob uchastii zhenchshin v proizvodstve po 5-mu planu," (December 1931–November 1933) ARDA f. 379, o. 18, d. 9, ll. 45–47.

⁴⁶ "Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov zhenskikh klubov na Vostoke. Baku," (March 8–12, 1930) GARF f. 3316, o. 42, d. 222, ll. 4–5.

⁴⁷ "Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov zhenskikh klubov na Vostoke. Baku," (March 8–12, 1930) GARF f. 3316, o. 42, d. 221, ll. 3–5.

⁴⁸ "Turk gadinlar haggynnda," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–4 (1932) 10–14.

with potato, cabbage, and carrot, and suggested reducing meat and dairy consumption as it is harmful to human health.⁴⁹

In the 1930s, the Stalinist government introduced a new gender discourse that propagandized the importance of family as a central element of increased population growth, that was required for the industrial, agricultural, and military efforts to build and defend the socialist motherland. In June 1936, the government introduced a new legal act, the Anti-Abortion and Protection of Maternity Law, that established a new vision for the roles of Soviet women. The law contradicted the old Bolshevik policies about women's equality, arguing that women's psychological predisposition and civic duty was to raising children, combined with career aspiration.⁵⁰ To justify this new gender policy, Soviet officials stated that since the socialist state under Stalin's rule had achieved economic prosperity and political stability, there was no need for abortions that deprived women of joyful motherhood. The authors of the new law explained that by introducing the Abortion Law in 1920, Bolsheviks aimed to reduce women's suffering from the outcomes of the First World War, capitalist exploitation, and the Civil War that brought famine, starvation, and diseases.⁵¹

The Stalinist government introduced strict measures to punish those who violated the new regulation. According to the new rule, medical professionals who performed abortions without legal permission, those who performed it outside of medical facilities, and those who performed it without a medical degree would be sentenced to five years. The anti-abortion law denied all women who were expecting their first child the right to have this medical procedure under any

⁴⁹ "Besh illik neft planin ikinci iarimde," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 5–6 (1931) 10–13.; "Besh illik plannyn an savatly karaylidy," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–4 (1932) 14–18; "Maslahatlar," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7–8 (1936) 18–20.

⁵⁰ Susan Gross Solomon, "The Demographic Argument in Soviet Debates over the Legalization of Abortion in the 1920s," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique* 33 (1992): 59–81.

⁵¹ "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 128–139.

circumstances. However, women who had at least five children, had medical conditions, whose spouse was disabled, or whose pregnancy was a result of rape could have access to this medical operation. In the meantime, women who had three abortions would be sentenced to six months of jail time.⁵² To preserve marriages and to decrease the number of divorces, the law required the installation of a high payment for a marriage annulment procedure, to be paid by its initiator. The law also increased the amount of alimony paid by the male divorcee. No marriages were allowed for those who annulled a marital union three times. The marital status of each Soviet citizen had to be indicated in the passport. Along with this, the state imposed a tax on childless marriages.⁵³

It is important to admit that in Turkey and Iran, which also underwent a societal transformation during the interwar period, the question of women's reproductive rights were not discussed because of strong patriarchal traditions and the power of religion over society. In Turkey, women were granted the right to abortion only in 1983, after a long struggle initiated by local feminists and socialists.⁵⁴ In Iran, women's right to control their body and family planning had never been more than a topic for a discussion among some feminist. To illustrate that women's reproductive rights gained considerable attention and served to broaden state agendas not only in the Soviet Union but also in other countries, I will compare the Soviet program with the German and Italian agendas.

Unlike the Soviet Union, a non-nationalist, multinational union of twelve ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse republics, Germany and Italy were nationalist states that initiated programs to establish cultural and ethnic homogeneity. In both German and Italian societies, the

⁵² "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 4–6.

⁵³ "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, l. 9.

⁵⁴ Abadan-Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Education Reforms on Turkish Women," 189

population's "purity" and growth became a focus of state attention. Therefore, government authorities began to consider women as biological reproducers of the nation and carriers of unique culture. To ensure the "good health" of the nation, states' authorities began to regulate family size and a woman's rights to control her body and social status.

In 1889, in spite of strong opposition from the Catholic Church, the Italian government introduced the Zanardelli Code, which decriminalized abortion, while prescribing strict sentences for abortions done late in pregnancy.⁵⁵ However, in 1923, with the establishment of the Fascist government under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, came an end to this liberty. Mussolini argued that an ideal Italian woman must have twelve children, as this was the only way Italy could provide the soldiers required for future wars. In 1927, Mussolini introduced a plan to increase the Italian population to sixty million from forty million within twenty-five years. Starting in 1931, the Italian government introduced the laws that deprived their people in accessing to contraceptives and information about birth control planning.⁵⁶ The Fascist regime imposed a tax on childless couples and prescribed penalties: imprisonment from two to five years for anyone obtaining or assisting with abortion, and one to four years for a woman who performed an abortion herself. Moreover, to control population growth, doctors had to register and report all pregnancies.⁵⁷

In Germany, with the establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1918, the new constitution granted women and men equality in political and civil rights. The new Weimar Constitution made women eligible to vote, hold public office, and pursue careers. In the Weimar Republic, due to the sex ratio imbalance caused by the First World War, there were over one million more female voters

⁵⁵ V. DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 48-52.

⁵⁶ DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, 54.

⁵⁷ DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, 56-58.

than male voters. So, women were politically active, particularly the members of the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party, advocating for so-called “voluntary motherhood.” As a result, in 1926, the government decriminalized abortion. One year later, in 1927, the German Supreme Court legalized abortion for medical reasons and established abortion clinics throughout Germany. Along with this, the state established birth control clinics to provide cheap contraceptives to the working class.⁵⁸ All these innovations were the result of the German system of nationalized welfare, similar to Soviet universal health care.

In 1933, with the foundation of Nazi rule in Germany, the situation regarding women’s reproductive freedoms changed. National socialism advocated motherhood as the highest point of female life. Like the Stalinist government, Nazi authorities introduced several social programs, including marriage loans and better chances of promotion for couples with several children. The government considered abortion as a crime against the Aryan race and introduced a sentence for fifteen years during the 1930s and the death penalty during the years of the Second World War for those who performed the abortions. The Nazi government established and maintained a new “racial” order based on ideology about the hierarchies of human inferiority.⁵⁹ The state began to boost the birth rates of “desirables” and to diminish birth rates among “undesirables,” in particular for Germans with hereditary diseases and for Jews, Roma, and Sinti. As a result, the government applied forced sterilizations and abortions to “undesirable” groups and from 1941, introduced the program of their total annihilation.⁶⁰

Even though the German Nazi and Italian Fascist regimes promoted compulsory motherhood only for “racially valuable” German and Italian women, the similarity with the Soviet

⁵⁸ Henry P. David, Jochen Fleischhacker, and Charlotte Hohn, “Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany,” in *Population and Development Review* 14, no. 1 (March 1988): 81–112.

⁵⁹ David, Fleischhacker, and Hohn, “Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany,” 92–95.

⁶⁰ David, Fleischhacker, and Hohn, “Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany,” 97–99.

reproductive program was in their common agenda to convert women into birth vessels to produce more soldiers and industrial workers required for strong militarized and industrialized states. However, the Soviet tactic to introduce an anti-abortion law was different from those implemented in Germany and Italy. Unlike in Western European political regimes, the Stalinist government “allowed” its citizens to discuss the need for this new regulation, organizing public discussions across the Soviet Union in May 1936.

In Azerbaijan, in May 1936, 10,239 women out of 25,555 participants took part in the discussion of the Anti-Abortion and Maternity Protection Law. In Baku alone, by June 14, 1936, there had been 248 meetings organized by Party officials to debate the law that criminalized abortion.⁶¹ Moreover, to propagandize the official discourse about the harmful character of abortion and to praise the benefits of motherhood for the female body and psyche, Azeri government officials employed medical workers. The government also glorified those women who had several children and supported this law. In one of these public discussions, Sureia Badzhi, a collective farmer from Kuba district and a mother of four sons and three daughters, praised the anti-abortion law because she wanted other women to experience the joy of motherhood. Zuleikha Abbasova, a mother of eight children from Khachmas district, expressed her thoughts: that women’s true duty was in childbearing.⁶² In particular, Azeri women praised the all-Union government’s initiative in discussing it before its introduction: this was considered an obvious sign of true democracy, absent in the capitalist world. Along with this, female delegates stressed that

⁶¹ “Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material’noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam,” (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 5–6.

⁶² “Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material’noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam,” (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 2–4.

raising children in a socialist society was not a burden because of the government system of free kindergartens, free education, and healthcare.⁶³

It is true that to support women and families, the Anti-Abortion Law and Maternity Protection Law regulated the building of more kindergartens, and kitchens with free food for newborn children.⁶⁴ However, in Azerbaijan, because of the strong traditional culture and close family ties, Azeri women preferred to take care of their children in the family environment rather than to trust state institutions. The statistical data indicates that only 8.3 percent of urban women and 0.5 percent of rural women, mostly of European background, sent their children to the kindergartens.⁶⁵ Azeri women preferred to enroll their children into state-run nurseries only if they were at the clubs for Muslim women, while they were studying or working there.

The new cohort of Azeri political leaders, under the leadership of Stalin's protégé Mir Dzhafar Bagirov, head of AzSSR between 1932–1953, in their zealotry to serve the Stalinist regime, promoted the new women's role as a destiny for mothers, often in absurd ways. They organized public meetings of childless couples with those who had children. During these meetings, the couples with children had to elevate the feeling of the happiness of being a parent and to glorify their offspring's achievements which could only be realized in a socialist country.⁶⁶ Some statements were absolutely ridiculous in their character. In Sheki district, a collective farm member named Mariam Shabalut, mother of seven children, initiated a socialist competition among the female community members to have more children. In Kirovabad district, local women promised to "increase their fertility" to produce more socialist citizens. Similar campaigns that

⁶³ "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 1–3.

⁶⁴ "Stenogramma soveshchaniia glav raionnykh komitetov" (May 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 9–11.

⁶⁵ "Stenogramma soveshchaniia glav raionnykh komitetov" (May 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 10–15.

⁶⁶ "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 10–11.

urged Azeri women to produce more children happened across all republic.⁶⁷ Remarkably, no one questioned the legitimacy of the state, which claimed to be an international leader in women's emancipation, during these public meetings to eliminate a woman's right to control her body. Party protocols and letters sent to the *Sharg Gadini* editors by Azeri women expressed support for the introduction of the law, considering it to represent the state's sincere attention for its female subjects.⁶⁸

Such zeal for the new gender program, and many other government initiatives, was a direct result of the Stalinist political terror that liquidated the old Azeri Bolsheviks and frightened the new ones. As Baberowski states, Stalin's mass terror began first in Azerbaijan, in 1929. The historian explains his argument by analyzing Stalin's revolutionary activity in the Caucasus, particularly in proletariat-rich Baku, where he made political enemies among the local members of the Musavat, Hummet, and even Bolshevik parties. In the Caucasus, Stalin also learned the archaic norms of honor, vengeance, and violence towards political opponents, skills he fully exercised becoming the all-Soviet leader. The historian argues that Stalin tested totalitarianism as a form of government first in Azerbaijan in 1929, and then all over the Soviet Union in the 1930s.⁶⁹ Thus, the liquidation of Azeri liberal old Bolsheviks and other political opponents who questioned Stalin's personal authority and Moscow-sent directives, and the atmosphere of terror created by Stalin's henchmen since 1929, were the main factors that Azeri government officials and commoners accepted all new laws without questioning. As a result, government and periodical documents of the 1930s illustrate the glorification of all Stalin's reforms. As Stephen Kotkin notes,

⁶⁷ "Materialy ob itogakh TsIK SSSR o zapreshchenii abortov i uvelichenii material'noi pomoshchi rozhenitsam i materiam," (May 25, 1936–June 14, 1936) ARDA f. 379, o.18, d. 39, ll. 12.

⁶⁸ "Analar meslehetler. Abort ushag saldirmag nedir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 7–8 (1936) 18–20; "Analyg va cocuklug muhafizesi," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 4–6 (1934) 10–13.

⁶⁹ Baberowski, *Vrag est' vezde*, 14–15.

Soviet citizens learned to “speak Bolshevik,” to express an indisputable recognition of Stalinist politics in the years of the Great Terror, as the only tactic to survive and gain some rewards.⁷⁰

Soviet Azeri writers and contributors to *Sharg Gadini* promoted this new Soviet discourse that both motherhood and achievements outside home contributed to woman’s true happiness.⁷¹ Official reports stated that in admiration for Russian shock workers, Azeri women of all ages became inspired to set new records to become exemplary Soviet women. The Soviet media specified that in the 1930s, thousands of Azeri women such as Almas Alieva, Mania Kerimova, Taira Tairova, Mariam Kadyrli, Gulzar Abdullayeva, Nazli Abdullayeva, Zubeida Babaeva, Banush Abbasova, and many others, received orders and medals for their success in the national economy, mostly cotton production. Dozens received the highest Soviet award, the Hero of Socialist Labor; several women even received it twice, such as Basti Bagirova and Shamama Gasanova. Official reports and the press popularized Azeri women’s achievements to illustrate Stalinist-style Muslim women’s emancipation.⁷² As Ali Igmen states, the proclamation of Soviet heroines became a primary agenda of Stalinist cultural policies that had to promote the new concept of Soviet womanhood.⁷³

In Azerbaijan, this program had to influence Azeri women’s self-image in the socialist society. *Sharg Gadini* provided numerous picture galleries of the best female cotton producers, industrial workers, and machine gunners and snipers dressed in military uniforms.⁷⁴ The journal

⁷⁰ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 220–223.

⁷¹ “Analyg va cocuklug muhafizesi,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 2–4 (1934) 6–14.

⁷² “Emekchi gadinlar socialismurusulunda,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 1–2 (1931) 6–10; “1931–1932 neft va pambig planyn”, *Sharg Gadini*, no. 3–4 (1931) 5–6; *Sharg Gadini* 4, (1932) 18–20 ; “Her bir gadin 5 illik plan bilmelidir” *Sharg Gadini* 2-5, 1930. “Socialist iarysh nadir?” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 15–16 (1932).

⁷³ Ali Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 137–138.

⁷⁴ “Kizil Ordu ile siki rabite baglamali. Herbilemiz gadinlar,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 15–16 (1932).

⁷⁴ “Butun kendli va ischi Kadinlar socialism tesefurratden tesgil va idare etmegi oirenmeli ve bunun ucun birinci novbede savadsyzleklerin legv etmelidir,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 10 (1929) 5–8.

editors published the pictures of the young Azeri female students receiving instructions from male mentors to master military knowledge. The journal's editors also featured Azeri women who won first prizes at local, regional, and all-republican shooting competitions.⁷⁵ These images reflected the state policy to introduce women to military training as a crucial part of the new model of gender equality.

The socialist government, initiating the mass entry of Soviet women into industry, promised to liberate women from male submissiveness, making them financially independent. This new gender discourse was different from the original Bolshevik feminist promises about equality in labor, education, and politics. Providing educational and working opportunities to Soviet women, the Communist government trained its female populace to defend their motherland at the workstation in case of imminent war with capitalists.⁷⁶ So, political and military needs changed not only the Soviet economy but also women's societal roles. The new gender program demanded that women fulfill economic plans, have more children, and be ready to defend their socialist motherhood, and this became the new norm of women's liberation.

Always higher, higher, and higher

Starting in 1922, Soviet leaders believed in the "inevitable war" launched by world capitalists against the young socialist state. In the 1930s, the Stalinist government defined Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan as major enemies. The Stalinist theory of the "enemy at the gate" aided the government in mobilizing the population and industrialize the Soviet state in an unprecedented way. According to Stalin, in 1931, the Soviet Union was fifty or even one hundred

⁷⁵ "Imperialist muharibesi eleihine proletary inglab ugrundu," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 15–16 (1934) 2–6.

⁷⁶ "Otchet o provedenii v zhizn' postanovleniia TsIK o zhenskom obrazovanii," (September 1929–January 1931) ARDA f.57, o. 1, d. 700, ll. 1–5.

years behind the developed world, so to survive among aggressive capitalists, the young socialist state had to modernize itself in ten years.⁷⁷ The Stalinist vision of the future war also established the young generation of the Soviet state as fighters ready to defend their socialist motherland. Preparations for the imminent war included the introduction of military training for young Soviet citizens, both men and women. To prepare its civilians, the government began with the reformation of the educational system and the establishment of paramilitary clubs.

The new coeducational system aimed to create new gendered relationships free from patriarchal male and female identities.⁷⁸ Both boys and girls had to be equally knowledgeable in math, science, art, and newly introduced military disciplines, such as shooting, using a gas mask, and air and chemical defense, along with training in physical culture.⁷⁹ Within the secondary and higher education system, the main liaison between the government and Soviet youth became the All-Union Young Communist League, *Komsomol*, which indoctrinated the young generation with Communist ideals. Since 1927, the *Komsomol*'s close partner was another mass organization – the Society for the Promotion of Defense, Aviation, and Chemical Development, *OSOAVIAKHIM*. This public paramilitary association was instrumental in raising patriotism in a society living under the constant fear of war. *OSOAVIAKHIM* became an important tool in mobilizing the population not only for the noble mission of defending the socialist motherland but also in promoting Soviet-type gender equality. The organization trained young women and men equally to be sharpshooters, parachutists, and pilots.

⁷⁷ “Rech’ tov. Stalina na pervoi vsesoiuznoi konferentsii rabotnikov promyshlennykh predpriatii,” *Pravda*, February 5, 1931.

⁷⁸ Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 51.

⁷⁹ “Savad iolunda, bedii terbie,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 8 (1929) 6–10; “Saglam beden ogrunda,” *Sharg Gadini*, no. 15–16, (1932) 14–15.

By 1931, the Society had eleven million members who received training in shooting, flying, and parachute-jumping. In 1935, the *OSOAVIAKHIM* had 122 Flying Clubs and more than one thousand parachute stands across the Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan, there were thirteen clubs and six parachute stands, situated mostly in Baku and its surroundings: Amiradzhani, Zabrat, Mardakian, Balakhany, and Baladzgary. In 1935 alone, the all-Union Komsomol and the *OSOAVIAKHIM* together reported that 800,000 people jumped off parachute stands, and 3,500 people graduated from flying clubs and became certified pilots. In the first half of 1936, 10,500 people jumped out of planes.⁸⁰ To prepare Soviet youth for war, in 1934, The Komsomol Central Committee introduced an exam in military training. The exam's requirements were to pass rifle shooting, grenade throwing, and jumping with a parachute, demonstrate the ability to perform first aid, and have basic knowledge in topographical maps and mechanics.⁸¹

Throughout the 1930s, *OSOAVIAKHIM* organized various sky-diving and flight campaigns to popularize aviation among young Soviet women and men. Including women in civilian military training, the Stalinist government considered the use of female military force in the future war. According to the Soviet doctrine on defense mobilization, skydiving and piloting would be the most important factors for victory in future war. In the early 1930s, many Soviet women were promoted to newly available jobs such as parachuting and flying instructors. This change in gender roles was part of a state-sponsored program that encouraged women to enter into traditionally non-female occupations.

⁸⁰ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 47.

Precise data for the number of paratroopers trained at schools and the number of flights performed in Azerbaijan is absent at the ARDA. The Azeri media's records state that, "hundreds of Azeri youth trained to jump with parachute" or "dozens of Azeri pilots are ready to deliver mail across the republic," "dozens of Azeri pilots are ready to help collective farmers."

⁸¹ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 53.

OSOAVIAKHIM leaders introduced a system to recruit female parachutists and pilots based on quotas that required and regulated women's participation in the organization. This policy also aimed to retain a certain number of women graduates who would become future pilots and instructors.⁸² In Azerbaijan, local officials responded to this call with all seriousness. Azeri political leaders, such as M. Guliyev, the Minister of Public Education, initiated a campaign to elevate Soviet achievements in Muslim women's emancipation to a new level, setting new standards in maintaining the status of role model for all of the Muslim East.⁸³ The important part of that program became the cultivation of female military aviators — the only Muslim Turkic women in the family of Soviet female pilots.



Figure 33. From left to right, Leila Mamedbekova, Sona Nurieva, and Zuleikha Seidmamedova, Baku, 1936. ARDA photo.

⁸² Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 59.

⁸³ M. Guliyev, "VI umumi Azerbaijan Sovetler gurultaiyinda respublikada medani guruilig meselelary haggynda AzSSR Khalg Maarif komissary ioldash M. Guliyev me'rusesi," *Vestnik arkhivov AzSSR*, 1975 1–2. D. 98. 171–174.

In the 1930s, the Azeri *OSOAVIAKHIM* nurtured three Azeri female pilots, who were also flight and parachuting instructors. One of them, Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi (1909–1989), was born in Baku to the family of Bolshevik revolutionary Alaskar Zeynalov, who was also a close friend to Nariman Narimanov. In her autobiography, Mamedbekova recalled that her father, an ardent Communist intending to advance Bolshevik power in Azerbaijan, sent her to distribute Bolshevik leaflets among Baku city dwellers several times.⁸⁴ Like many Muslim girls of that period, Mamedbekova got married at a young age, thirteen. Her husband, Bakhrām Mamedbekov, was a Communist and a government employee. In 1926, Mamedbekov insisted on removing his wife's *chadra* and enrolling Leila into the Ibrahim Abilov Club to prepare for university. Mamedbekova, like many other Azeri women, officially unveiled in 1928, at a community meeting at the Club for Print Workers named after Comrade Stalin, *Klub Pechatnikov Imeni tov. Stalina*. Together with her husband, they had five children.

Mamedbekova always stressed that her husband's support helped her to graduate from the college in 1930 and to become a pilot. Between 1930–1931, she was a member of *OSOAVIAKHIM*, and the Baku School of Aviation. For two years, between 1931–1933, Mamedbekova was a student at the Moscow School of Aviation, studying to become a flight instructor. In March 1933, she made a parachute jump, becoming the 84th jumper among all Soviet paratroopers. After her return to Azerbaijan, she worked as head of the *OSOAVIAKHIM* Pilot Club in Baku. During the war years and after, 1941–1947, she headed the parachute-gliding club.

⁸⁴ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi (1909–1989) "Lichnyi fond" ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 1–4.



Figure 33. Figure 33. Leila Mamedbekova in *chadra*. ARDA photo.

Figure 34. Leila Mamedbekova with her son Rustam at the airport in Zabrat, 1940. ARDA photo.

In her autobiographical record, Mamedbekova bitterly noted that the Azeri government denied her request to serve at the front because she was a mother of five children. However, trusting her professionalism, it assigned her to train paratroopers. Mamedbekova personally trained four thousand male paratroopers, two of whom, Adil Guliyev and Nikolai Sheverdiaev, became *Heroes of the Soviet Union*, the highest sign of the Soviet distinction awarded for exceptional service to the state and society. She also trained her son, Rustam Mamedbekov, to become a combat pilot during the Second World War, and to work as a civil pilot after the war. After the Second World War, and until her retirement in 1964, Mamedbekova worked as head of the pilot club and supervised a unit of paratroopers.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi (1909–1989) “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 8–12.



Figure 35. Zuleikha Seiidmamedova. Baku, 1934. ARDA photo.

Another Azeri-born female pilot, Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi (1919–1999), was a combat fighter during the Second World War. Zuleikha was born in Baku to a well-educated family: her father was a financier, and her mother was a graduate of one of the Tagiev schools.⁸⁶ Between 1934–1938, Seiidmamedova studied at the Azerbaijan Industrial University, in the department of oil engineering. In 1934, her first year as a student, she joined the *OSOAVIAKHIM* club. In 1935, being promoted by native government officials, this young Azeri woman took part in the all-Union rally of parachutists at the Moscow Tushino airbase, to make a group jump. This group jump symbolized the friendship of all Soviet people that does not know gender or ethnic boundaries. Seiidmamedova represented the Azeri republic, its people, and emancipated Muslim women.⁸⁷ In 1938, she entered the Moscow Air Military Academy, named after Zhukovskii, to study military navigation. In May 1941, she graduated the academy as a military aircraft navigator. In December 1941, she became a member of *Aviation Group 122*, which consisted only of female pilots, such as the famous Russian Soviet female fighters Marina Raskova, Lidia Litvak, Ekaterina

⁸⁶ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 2–3.

⁸⁷ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o, 2, d. 16, l. 58.

Budanova, and others. Seiidmamedova participated in five hundred flights as a navigator of fighter pilots at the most dangerous fronts: the battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, Warsaw, and Vienna. After demobilization from military service in 1952, Seiidmamedova became a Minister of Social Security of the Republic of Azerbaijan.⁸⁸



Figure 36. Sona Nurieva. Baku, 1934. ARDA photo.

Nurieva Sona Piri qizi (1915–1986) was an Azeri female aviator who performed top secret missions before and during the Second World War. Nurieva’s father, Piri Nuriev, was an oil engineer. Prior to the revolution, he studied in England and worked for Nobile’s Brothers’ and Tagiev’s oil enterprises. After the sovietization of Azerbaijan, he worked at the oil refinery plant

⁸⁸ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 9–10.

and became head of the shock workers' brigade. Sona Nurieva stated with respect that her father's oil team finished the Five-Year Plan for oil production in two and half years. Piri Nuriev had been given many government awards for his service and was among the first in Azerbaijan to receive the Order of Lenin.⁸⁹ Sona Nurieva graduated from school in 1930. In 1932, she finished the *OSOAVIAKHIM* pilot school in Moscow. Between 1932–1934, she was a flight instructor at the Baku-based *OSOAVIAKHIM* club.

Starting in 1936, Nurieva worked as pilot for Soviet airlines. She came to prominence during the Second World War as a pilot who performed state secret missions.⁹⁰ She flew to Iran to deliver instructions to Iranian Communists to establish the Communist regime, to overthrow Reza Shah, and to prepare for the Tehran Conference. In November–December 1943, Nurieva was one of the pilots who transported Soviet political leaders, including Stalin, to Iran for the meeting with world leaders F. D. Roosevelt and W. Churchill at the Tehran Conference.⁹¹ After the war, Nurieva worked as a civil pilot for the international airlines until her retirement in 1968.⁹²

In Iran and Turkey, both governments also introduced feminist projects, promising to give Muslim women new opportunities in professions outside the home. The reforms aimed to transform Muslim women from secluded and illiterate into educated and skilled, even in traditionally male professions. In Iran, between 1936–1941, Reza Shah's radical transformation of womanhood, called the *Women's Awakening*, became a major watershed in making Iran modern. Women's journals like *Alem-e Nisvan*, *Women's World*, and *Iran-e Bastan, Ancient Iran*, promoted the state program to familiarize Iran's women with industry and public education.

⁸⁹ Nurieva Sona Piri qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f. 2661, o. 3, d. 3, ll. 1–3.

⁹⁰ Nurieva Sona Piri qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f. 2661, o. 3, d. 3, ll. 7–8.

⁹¹ Nurieva Sona Piri qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f. 2661, o. 3, d. 3, ll. 12–14.

⁹² Nurieva Sona Piri qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f. 2661, o. 3, d. 3, l. 22.

The journals introduced an image of a “professional woman” to the general public. In particular, the journal *Iran-e Bastan* demonstrated to Iranian readers the significance of modern women for the progress of the society. It is important to admit that the journal’s chief editor was Sayf Azad, a Nazi sympathizer who supported Reza Shah in his pursuit to justify the common Aryan heritage of Iranians and Germans. As a result, the journal chose a pro-German type of modernity to propagandize among Iran’s population. The journal publicized the image of German women parachutists, female members of a Nazi motorbike club, female pilots, and athletes. The journal editors highlighted the achievements of the Nazi state in liberating women and making them physically fit to be strong mothers and workers.⁹³

Other women’s journals, *Shokufeh* and *Danesh*, also propagandized the state idea that women could be active outside the home while remaining good mothers and wives. The journals’ editors promoted the idea that Iran’s women could master military occupations, particularly aviation.⁹⁴ Sadigeh Dowlatshahi, a twenty-five-year-old clerk at the Treasury Ministry in Tehran, responded to this appeal. Born in 1914 to a Bahai family, she was educated in the public schools of Beirut and Tehran. In 1940, she enthusiastically accepted the Shah’s call to introduce both men and women into the newly established flight school. The government paid for her studies and provided a car to take her to the airbase and a personal plane for training. Reza Shah directly curated her achievements and visited her show flights during the graduation ceremony. The Iran’s print media highlighted her flying achievements, stressing her family status as a married woman in the meantime.⁹⁵

⁹³ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 169–170.

⁹⁴ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 172.

⁹⁵ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 176.

The purpose of this project was to create an Iranian model of the emancipated Muslim woman. As Amin states, by popularizing Dowlatshahi's image, the state showed that Iran's women had become modern, mastering even the art of piloting an aircraft. Also, this image of Iranian women's progress was closer to female Iranians than that imported from the West. However, this project to introduce women to aviation was short-lived and unsuccessful. Unlike the Soviet Azeri female aviators, after graduation neither Dowlatshahi nor other unnamed female aeronauts worked in aviation as the pilots or instructors.⁹⁶ I state that Iran's model of women's transformation aimed only to create a native model of the emancipated woman rather than a professional woman.

The Turkish model of the new woman was part of the broader national program to create a nationalist military-state. The Turkish military model emerged in Ottoman times, the years of loss and suffering as a result of the Balkan Wars and the First World War.⁹⁷ The political and intellectual leaders of the collapsing Ottoman empire proposed several programs to create a nation-state with centralized administrative power, a modern education system, and a citizen-army. One of the ideological fathers was Yusuf Akçura. In 1904, in his essay *Uch Tarz-i Siaset, Three Types of Policies*, Akçura stated that there were three models to create the future Turkish nation: Ottomanist, Islamist, and Turkist. According to Akçura, the first two had already played their roles in the history of Turkish people. The future would belong to Turkism that required the Turkification of all Muslim elements of the former Ottoman empire. This political platform was different from the previous two programs that tolerated cultural independence for all Imperial

⁹⁶ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 186–188.

⁹⁷ On Ottoman and Turkish national identity and militarism, see: Renée Worringer, *Ottoman Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Handan Nezir Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

subjects.⁹⁸ The Republican government began to implement this doctrine on Turkism after the years of The War of Independence (1919–1923).

As Ayşe Gül Altınay states, state-led Turkish nationalism purposefully suppressed cultural and ethnic differences within the new national borders. Along with this, to justify the politics of Turkishness, the Kemalist government rewrote Ottoman and Turkish history and created a myth about the Turkish nation as a military-nation, where men and women were equally remarkable in warfare.⁹⁹ The new official discourse stated that all Turks, regardless of gender, had been the best soldiers since ancient times and possessed the military spirit. In addition, it argued that the establishment of a conscripted army in 1927 was not a necessity of the time but was a natural feature of the Turkish cultural character shaped throughout history. Altınay states that the myth that the “Turkish nation was a military-nation” became a basis for modern Turkish ideology and created military heroes of both genders.¹⁰⁰ One of them was Sabiha Gökçen, the adopted daughter of Atatürk. In 1937, she became the world’s first combat pilot participating in an internal military campaign at the age of twenty-four.

Gökçen was born in 1913 to the family of a military officer. In 1925, Atatürk adopted Sabiha after the death of both of her parents. Along with other twelve of Atatürk’s other adoptive children, she received a modern education in Istanbul, Vienna, and Paris. In May of 1935, she attended the ceremony for the establishment the Turkish Aviation Society and was impressed with the flight of Soviet guest aviators of both genders. She expressed her wish to become a pilot to Atatürk, who encouraged her to pursue this career to set an example to other Turkish women in

⁹⁸ Yusuf Akçura, “Three Types of Policies,” in *Central Asia Reader: The Rediscovery of History*, ed. H. B. Paksoy (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 101–116.

⁹⁹ Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New-York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19 - 21.

¹⁰⁰ Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 30–31.

becoming modern. After completing two months of courses at the Turkish Aviation Society, she went to study in Moscow and Odessa along with seven male pilots. After returning to Turkey, at age twenty-three she joined the Air Academy as the only female student, to become a military officer. Like Iranian female pilot Dowlatshahi, Gökçen received personal training along with the private plane adjusted to her height. This was different from the Soviet tactic to prepare female pilots in a gender-mixed environment. In 1937, Gökçen had the chance to exercise her military skills participating in the Dersim Offence; Dersim was a Turkish province dominated by Kurds.¹⁰¹

Atatürk, like the Soviet leaders, believed that soldiers do not have gender identity. So, he aspired for Gökçen to go to war, stating that “she is no longer a young girl but a young soldier”.¹⁰² In the meantime, understanding that her participation in actual combat would become a hallmark in the process to make Turkish women modern, he assigned her another duty: to preserve her honor (and the nation’s) in case of capture by enemies. Atatürk gave her his personal pistol and asked her to kill herself rather than to become a captive and a victim of a rape.¹⁰³ With this act, Atatürk highlighted that despite all the reforms to emancipate women, for the majority of Turkish society, she still was a woman whose sexuality could be violated and thus needed to be protected. This episode reflects that the republican society of the 1930s was not completely free from patriarchal prejudices where a threat to *namus*, female honor, was the ultimate danger, not death. This point of view was remarkably different from the Soviet discourse that did not consider gender difference when assigning military missions to its soldiers. Since the early 1930s, Soviet female pilots, regardless of their ethnic and religious background, were equal with male soldiers and received only one instruction: to protect the honor of their socialist motherland. It is important to admit that

¹⁰¹ Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 39.

¹⁰² Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 38

¹⁰³ Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 38.

in the 1930s, the word *namus* equally disappeared from the vocabulary of the Azeri official reports, periodicals, and works of fiction.

After the Dersim operation, an ethno-national conflict with the Kurds who resisted the government-enforced policy to assimilate them, Gökçen became a national heroine. In accordance with the official rhetoric, Gökçen proved that Turkic women could, like their pre-Muslim ancestors, defend the interests of their nation. Atatürk stated that the participation of Gökçen in real combat, throwing bombs on patriarchal communities, was a symbolic act to end the country's cultural backwardness. As he stated, she dropped “the final bomb that would destroy Feudalism.”¹⁰⁴ This expression was similar to the Soviet program to introduce Muslim women to aviation.¹⁰⁵ Both projects aimed to end patriarchal power in Muslim society by making women equal with men in the military sphere. However, unlike the Soviet program to create female pilots and employ them in military and civil aviation, Turkish government authorities never realized their program fully. Gökçen, like Dowlatshahi from Iran, was the only woman pilot to serve her country; she served only for a brief period of time and resigned from military service after Atatürk's death in 1938.

Unlike the short-lived Iranian and Turkish programs to introduce Muslim women to aviation, the Azeri government widely employed Azeri female aviators as pilots and instructors until their retirement in 1960s. The Azeri government also promoted Muslim women's achievements in aeronautics, crediting the Socialist state and juxtaposing the achievements of Soviet Azerbaijan with those in Turkey and Iran. It is important to admit that similar to many Soviet people who came to prominence in the 1930s, the Azeri female pilots themselves glorified

¹⁰⁴ Altınay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 41–42.

¹⁰⁵ “Otchet o provedenii v zhizn' postanovleniia TsIK o zhenskom obrazovanii,” (September 1929–January 1931) ARDA f.57, o. 1, d. 700, ll. 5–10.

the Soviet government for their liberation from patriarchy and support in professional spheres that could not be achieved by their Iranian and Turkish sisters.¹⁰⁶ Seiidmamedova, in her autobiographical account *Zapiski Letchitsy, The Aviator's Notes*, stressed that she came from a family that benefited from Soviet power. She provided the example of her mother, Mina Ali qizi, stating that she was an illiterate person before the revolution and silencing the fact about her education at the *Tagiev school*. Seiidmamedova wrote that her mother went to study only after the establishment of Bolshevik power: she began directly with the training at the Medical University and went on to become a well-known doctor-gynecologist. Seiidmamedova and others compared the position of Azeri women before Soviet power to that in the socialist state, saying that women were deprived of the light, *ishig*, under *chadra*, and of fresh air behind the thick walls, because of the *Sharia* norms that kept them unenlightened.¹⁰⁷

Along with this, Seiidmamedova glorified the new gender roles nurtured by Soviet power, describing her older brother's respect for her as a pilot who introduced him to aviation and showed him the Earth and the sky.¹⁰⁸ This statement echoes the discourse promoted by the old-Imperial reformers, that it should be educated women who brought knowledge about the world to young men. As discussed elsewhere, the women's journal *Ishig* also advocated these ideas, even placing an image of the educated mother showing the endless horizon to a young boy as a symbol of the new world full of opportunities on the cover page. Along with this, Seiidmamedova recalled that female pilots expressed their femininity during the war by decorating their uniforms with fur and flowers and bleaching or cutting their hair in non-military styles. She also described the skepticism

¹⁰⁶ "Stalin jol hesabat muruzesi," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 5 (1934) 3–7; "Suranlar ittifaginyn gadinlar dunianin an xoshbekht gadylnaridir," *Sharg Gadini*, no. 5 (1936) 18–20.

¹⁰⁷ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 4–6.

¹⁰⁸ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 16–18.

about women's ability to fly and fight among fellow male pilots, who thought of every female pilot more as a woman rather than as a professional or a soldier.¹⁰⁹

Advocating for friendship among all Soviet peoples, Azeri female aviators also elevated the strong support of the Russian instructors who helped them to realize their dreams about long-distance flights and parachute jumping from a plane. In particular, Seiidmamedova specified that it was Russian people, namely men, Vladimir Tkachenko and Nikolai Shestopalov, who introduced her and other Azeri students to *OSOAVIAKHIM*.¹¹⁰ Azeri female pilots also stressed their connection with all Soviet women and men. In particular, they described all Soviet people's concerns about the imminent war with the imperialist West. Seiidmamedova recalled how she, like each Soviet person, followed the news about the heroism of the Soviet polar expeditions and the victory over the Japanese army in the Far East. She wrote with special admiration about the Russian female aviators who set the new world record in distance flight.¹¹¹

In September 1938, three Slavic female pilots, Marina Raskova, Polina Osipenko, and Valentina Grizodubova, performed a long-distance flight from Moscow to the Far East, Komsomolsk-na-Amure city. Their flight, named *Rodina, Motherland*, attracted much attention for promoting women's role in aviation. They became the first women pilots to fly more than five thousand kilometers and set an international record for straight-line distance flying. They aimed to compete with world-famous female aviators, such as Amelia Earhart and Ruth Nichols, who had flown four thousand kilometers. The Soviet female pilots set a record, covering 5,947 kilometers in twenty-six hours and twenty-nine minutes. The Soviet press presented this flight as the result of the socialist gender policy that enabled every Soviet woman to realize her dreams.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond" ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 61–63.

¹¹⁰ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 15–19.

¹¹¹ Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 35–37.

¹¹² Seiidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 55–60.

Seidmamedova was joyful to graduate from the Air Military Academy in May 1941, hoping to be helpful to her motherland in a time of war in Western Europe and the Far East. She wrote that those dreams to defend her *Vatan*, Motherland, came true when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Seidmamedova described the feeling of honor in becoming an equal crew member with the famous female pilots during the Second World War and admired them for their friendship.¹¹³

In 1934, to popularize the Azeri female aviators' achievements, along with the achievements of all Azeri women as emancipated all over the Soviet Union and Middle East, the Azeri government produced the silent film, *Ismet, End of Adat*, that was also distributed in Turkey and all over the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴ The film illustrated the life of Mamedbekova before and after the sovietization of Azerbaijan. Presenting the pre-revolution period as a period of darkness, the film stated that Muslim women were powerless creatures. According to the film's plot, that situation changed during the Communist empowerment in Azerbaijan. Referring to Mamedbekova as an emancipated Azeri woman, they glorified the socialist reforms that helped her and others to live full lives as mothers, wives, and highly skilled professionals who mastered a traditionally male sphere, the military career.¹¹⁵ During the film's production, Mamedbekova herself played the parts where the heroine should fly and instruct her students, however, the other parts of her life were represented by a Jewish-born actress, Zhuka Michelson. In 1933 and 1934, Azeri poet Mikail Mushfig (1908–1938) dedicated two poems to Mamedbekova, *Afshan* and *Shoila*. In 1935, the poet Samed Vurgun wrote the poem *Leila*. In all of these poems the authors glorified the Soviet state that had emancipated Azeri women through education and work opportunities and stressed the ignorant position of those Turkic women who lived in the capitalist states.

¹¹³ Seidmamedova Zuleikha Gabib qizi, "Lichnyi fond," ARDA f.2661, o, 2, d. 16, ll. 59-62.

¹¹⁴ *Adat*, in Azerbaijani, means patriarchal tradition.

¹¹⁵ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi, (1909–1989) "Lichnyi fond" ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 18–20.

To attract more Muslim women to aviation, the Azeri government also assigned local female pilots to give lectures across the republic and to perform show flights. In one of those flights, Mamedbekova took on board Basti Bagirova, a famous cotton producer and two time recipient of the Hero of Socialist Labor. That flight symbolized the union of the urban and rural worlds, femininity and technology. Along with this, this demonstration flight had to promote the idea that in Stalinist society, city and village women were equally able to achieve sky-high limits.¹¹⁶ Even though the official Soviet discourse instructed women to defend and work for the benefit of their motherland, it also promoted the image of a professional woman and mother living according to her biological predestination.

In particular, the Azeri government extensively popularized Mamedbekova's transformation from an illiterate, veiled Muslim woman with many children to an independent professional woman who mastered a traditional male sphere: aviation. State authorities widely propagandized her motherly duty, raising her son Rustam as a combat pilot during the Second World War. Moscow and Baku-based officials, equally, assigned Mamedbekova to present socialist achievements in Muslim women's emancipation at various meetings with Western male and female aviators in Moscow.¹¹⁷ Along with this, the Soviet Azeri media stressed the roles of the male family members of famous women pilots. Journalists and women pilots emphasized the importance of supportive fathers and husbands, who advised them to unveil, or to go to the club, and then to flight school. Two of the Azeri female pilots, Mamedbekova and Nurieva, were married to husbands who were Communists and government employees. They had children and, in the press, they promoted the image of a new kind of mother, who loved her offspring and respected her husband for his support in raising them. In particular, Mamedbekova recalled her children's

¹¹⁶ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi, (1909–1989) “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 19–22.

¹¹⁷ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi, (1909–1989) “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 22–25.

admiration of her flying career, which shaped their predisposition to become pilots, like their heroic mother. She praised her husband for acting as a guardian while she was away for several weeks or months at a time for training.¹¹⁸

As a result, Azeri female pilots became role models that demonstrated how the military and other careers could be combined with familial and maternal responsibilities. In the 1930s, the Azeri professional women also emphasized that their mothering responsibilities, to raise good citizens, would not be accomplished without the state network of kindergartens and schools. They, along with female industrial and agrarian workers, credited the Stalinist government for giving them opportunities to end an ignorant existence and to become fully liberated from male patriarchy and domestic routine unlike their female counterparts in Turkey and Iran. Azeri women wrote letters and articles crediting the Communist Party and socialist state for all their achievements, stressing Stalin's role for his thoroughness in addressing Muslim women's well-being.¹¹⁹

Hence, with consolidation of Stalinist power, the program for women's liberation changed significantly. The new economic and political program to make the Soviet Union a competitive world power redefined female liberties. Iran and Turkey underwent the same process to rapidly modernize Muslim societies through the transformation of womanhood. In all of these political entities, governments aimed to modernize the societies by promulgating economic change, secularism, and in the cases of Iran and Turkey, the nation-state. In republican Turkey, the shift from a multi-ethnic empire to an Anatolia-based nation-state with a Turkish national consciousness based on pre-Islamic heritage gave rise to the state-run women's transformation.

¹¹⁸ Mamedbekova Leila Alaskar qizi, (1909–1989) “Lichnyi fond” ARDA f. 2661, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 14–18.

¹¹⁹ “Otchet o provedenii v zhizn' postanovleniia TsIK o zhenskom obrazovanii,” (September 1929–January 1931) ARDA f.57, o. 1, d. 700, ll. 11–13.

The enfranchisement of women and secularization of the family code served to create a new state ideology. However, republican political leaders refused Turkish women the right to establish independent feminist associations, to work in traditional male industries, or to serve in the army, particularly in aviation. Only in the 1990s did several Turkish women receive education in administrative military occupations, after a long struggle claiming that the statute of the Army Academy postulated that “Turkish students” but not “Turkish male students” could study there. As Altinay argues, Turkish women, the “military daughters of the military-nation,” were related to the military only symbolically and only during the first years of Atatürk’s reforms.¹²⁰

In Iran, Raza Shah’s state program to emancipate women lasted only five years and failed because of the *Shia* clergy’s strong power over the local population. Another factor that limited the reforms derived from the nature of Reza Shah’s power: his regime was the result of a military coup rather than a social movement. Shah installed an army and police to control gender reformation. This tactic not only alienated the majority of the population from the reforms, but also subordinated women in their pursuit of emancipation. As Amin argues, Iran’s women never became fully liberated from patriarchy during the years of *Women’s Awakening*. The state simply expanded male supervision of Iranian women from traditional familial relationship (father, brother, husband) to wider social settings (Shah, government) during that reformative period.¹²¹ Hence, during the interwar period, states, rather than women and male native intellectuals, defined the development of womanhood.

In the Soviet Union, to become a competitive power in the international arena, the state-introduced Five-Year Plan, 1928–1932, brought the massive entry of women into the labor force. The Stalinist regime evoked the liberal family legalizations of the early Bolshevik period. In the

¹²⁰ Altinay, *The Myth of The Military-Nation*, 48.

¹²¹ Amin, *The Making of Modern Iranian Woman*, 188.

meantime, the government advanced a new image of femininity – a combination of a professional, highly-skilled woman and a happy mother. To ensure the compatibility of women’s family responsibilities with their professional duties, the Stalinist government promulgated a network of public child-care institutions. Along with this, the state introduced vast educational opportunities to acquire the new skills needed to enter even traditionally male occupations to all Soviet women. This program, accompanied by the new discourse about gender equality, significantly changed Soviet women’s societal status, regardless of the ethnic and cultural background.



Figure 37. The image of emancipated unveiled Azeri Soviet Women, Baku, 1933. AAKFD photo.

In 1930, to create the model of a liberated Muslim woman, the Azeri government introduced several Azeri women to aviation. The official Azeri program always stressed the success in Muslim women’s empowerment with the state programs to emancipate women in

Turkey and Iran. To create female heroines, the native government employed the examples of the all-Union Stakhanovites, shock workers, and Russian female aviators to inspire Azeri women to become modern. In meantime, unlike European Soviet women, the Azeri women always had to stress the liberating role of the Communist Party in rescuing them from oppressive Islamic and patriarchal norms. The Soviet authors manifested the new image of new Azeri women emphasizing their ignorant life before the Bolshevik revolution, their emancipation at the clubs for Muslim women, and finally their achievements working outside the home. The announcement of Azeri heroines was also a primary agenda of the native government that aimed to demonstrate to the all-Soviet Muslim women their new roles in the socialist society.

Conclusion

The incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Russian Empire marked a turning point in the history of Azeri Muslim people of the South Caucasus and Iran. To neutralize any association with Iran and to foster loyalty to Russian rule, Russian Imperial politics redefined the local society by establishing new norms of culture and social hierarchy. The tsarist politics of the involvement of the local Muslim gentry into the Russian imperial civil and military service created a new type of nobility and intelligentsia who became the intermediaries between Imperial authorities and the local population. The process of urbanization, in particular the transformation of Baku from a small town into a world leader in oil production expanded urban culture and changed the traditional Muslim intellectual milieu. This new urban, multi-ethnic environment boosted the formation of Azeri reformist discourse about the modernization of Muslim society. The new secularly educated elite established itself as a source of moral and cultural authority, replacing the traditional Islamic authority, *ulama*, in determining the way that the Azeri Muslim community lived and progressed. This modern, educated group of Azeris led the cultural transformation for the good of the *millat*, nation, claiming that the old, traditional authorities were unprepared for the needs and demands of the modern age. By establishing modern print media, theatre, and new-method education, the Azeri reformers created the new public space that enabled them to express ideas about societal and gender reorganization.

In the early and mid-nineteenth century, two Azeri reformers, A. K. Bakikhanov and M. F. Akhundov, proposed the assimilation of Russian culture and the need to turn Azeri Muslims into valuable contributors to Imperial culture and society. However, despite this discourse and the profound efforts of the Russian government to russify Azeri Muslims, to make the imperial domain

culturally homogeneous, the Azeris secured intellectual autonomy, adjusting to the new cultural settings. The exposure to Russian language and “civilization” through education, instead of complete assimilation, produced the modern, secular, bilingual intelligentsia who began to question the role and status of Azeri *millat* within the all-Russian milieu. Consequently, at the end of the nineteenth century, a new cohort of reform-minded intellectuals, such as H. Zardabi, A. Agaev, M. E. Rasulzade, and others, emerged. This group of intellectuals and politicians took a different path to transform old culture into modern. They proposed to be different from that which was traditional as well as distinctive from that which was Russian, connecting the latter to reactionary and colonial power.

Azeri intellectual sovereignty was a direct outcome of the deep-rooted traditional Muslim and Turkic culture, sustained by strong intellectual ties with the Muslim reformers of Iran and the Ottoman empire. This cultural environment allowed Azeri reorganizers to discuss ideas about cultural reformation of Muslim communities outside of the Russian empire. Moreover, through intellectual interconnections, Azeri reformers learned about the European-style cultural modernization that took place in the Ottoman empire and, thus, began to compare it with the Russian Imperial domain and tsarist programs on Muslim societal development. Consequently, reform-minded Azeri intellectuals chose to reinforce the Azeri domain, *millat*, by appropriating the European type of modernity, favoring Western liberal constitutionalism and enlightenment over autocratic Imperial values. This diversification allowed Azeri societal reformers to accept and adjust the European model of modernity into Muslim realities and thus, to participate not only in Russian but also in the global domain, equally Western and Eastern. Henceforth, I assert that Azeri intellectuals existed simultaneously in various cultural settings, such as Muslim, Russian, and European.

The late-Imperial reform-minded Azeri men debating methods for the fulfilment of their hopes for the *millat* faced significant opposition from two societal powers: the tsarist autocratic colonial state and *ulama*, the traditional religious leaders. Both controlled two major societal pillars, education and family: the primary societal institutions that the Azeri reformers aimed to modify. The Azeri intellectuals, striving to modernize Muslim society in accordance with what they imagined to be the standards of the civilized world, proposed the transformation of elementary education. In particular, they believed that implementing the new pedagogical method, *usul-i jadid*, would nurture educated young men and women, giving them the skills that were necessary for success in the modern world. However, this initiative met strong criticism from the Russian Imperial authorities, who pointed to the already functioning state-run schools whose primary goal was to raise native commercial and administrative staff. Thus, even after the establishment of native public schools, the Russian government closely monitored all native initiatives on the public schooling of young men and women. In particular, it controlled the *Neshr-i Maarif's* activity, claiming that its intellectual independence contributed to the rise of Azeri nationalism.

While Azeri modernist reformers aimed radically to change society in the name of progress, their opponents, traditionalist *ulama*, opposed this program, recognizing only the need to make minor corrections to the education of young men. Traditional Islamic leaders considered every modernist reform as a deviation from Islamic values and insisted on the continuity of traditional gender and societal norms. Nevertheless, the modernity-oriented reformers succeeded in the introduction of desacralized public education in urban centers not only for Azeri Muslim young men, but also for young women. This innovation resulted in fundamental societal changes, giving rise to the new cohort of independent and modern educated female intellectuals and civil servants.

The shift from traditional homeschooling to public education made Azeri Muslim women publicly visible and vocal members of the Azeri urban environment. Modern educated women voiced their thoughts on traditional gender relationships and illiteracy in the native print media. They established female associations and charitable societies. In Baku, the introduction of public schooling contributed to ending generational and gender hierarchies that prevailed in Muslim society. Modern education and work experience outside the home made Azeri women the new agents of societal modernization. Azeri Muslim women became integral agents towards societal transformation to create a new Azeri *millat*. However, these reforms that changed gender roles were limited only to culturally diverse Baku; outside this city, Azeri women continued to act in accordance with traditional societal expectations.

In February 1917, the Russian Revolution established liberal constitutionalism, giving new hope for political and cultural independence to all Imperial peoples. One of the first decrees of the Provisional Government was to grant women of all nationalities in the Russian empire the right to vote. The new political regime also tolerated debates about the cultural and political status of Imperial subjects. In Azerbaijan, native intellectuals and politicians demanded the establishment of their own nation-state instead of Muslim cultural autonomy within a unified Russia. With the establishment of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, 1918–1920, led by the Musavat Party, Azeri reformers succeeded in becoming the leaders of their *millat*. Azeri women took an active role, participating in the municipal and national assemblies and media to discuss the future of the *millat*. Moreover, they began to articulate their own understandings of rights, debating *Sharia*, Islamic law, on female status in society and the family.

Elite Azeri Muslim women believed that they were equal citizens of a young, independent nation that would not annul their previously granted political rights and thus, they did not discuss

suffrage. Instead, they demanded to implement this right among the local population, despite strong opposition from conservative members of the local society. Also, Azeri feminists, S. Efendiieva, S. Talishinskaia, A. Sultanova, D. Bairamova, and many others, unlike their female counterparts in Iran and the Ottoman empire, argued that women's rights within Islamic law, *Sharia*, should be replaced by secular law. This difference in the agenda to end patriarchal and religious norms around gender roles was a direct result of the deep-rooted desacralization of female education and the interaction of Russian feminism and Muslim feminism in old-Imperial Azerbaijan. Hence, it was Russian and European reformist discourse to change women, rather than Muslims, that shaped and empowered Azeri women to challenge *Sharia* and demand women's equality with men.

This feminist agenda was part of a broader cultural politics initiated by the reform-minded intellectuals and politicians of the ADR about secularism and public enlightenment. They declared the Azeri language an official language, founded the first public university, sent students to Europe to study, and invited teachers from the Ottoman empire and Europe. Promoting this politics, they aimed to distance themselves and their young nation from the Islamic and Russian orbits to build a modern, Western-type *millat*. However, this Musavatist vision of what was good for the *millat* was not universally shared in Azeri society.

Native Bolsheviks, who believed that the progress of Azerbaijan could be realized only under the aegis of Communism, were strong opponents to Musavat and the existence of the ADR as a pro-British and pro-Ottoman marionette state. Azeri Communists, Nariman Narimanov, Gazanfar Musabekov, Gamid Sultanov, Agamali ogli, Ayna Sultanova, Dzheiran Bairamova, and many others, welcomed the October Socialist revolution of 1917 that ended the period of liberal

constitutionalism. Being members of the Communist Party since the 1910s, they strongly believed in the liberal values of Communism and advanced the Bolshevik regime in Azerbaijan.

Azeri Bolsheviks argued that the Musavatist program of societal development emphasized the needs of the elite, but not the interests of all of the Azeri population, leaving out peasants and nomads, who were traditionally the silent strata of Muslim society. It is true that during the two years of its existence and while at war with the Baku Soviet of Bolsheviks, the British army, the Russian White army, and Armenian military groups in the regions, the ADR's government paid little attention to the rural world, while still extracting agricultural goods for the army and cities. It is also true that unlike the Bolsheviks, whose first decrees were to grant land to peasants and to stop all wars, the ADR government did not issue any resolutions regarding the agrarian and peace questions. Thus, the Bolsheviks' appeal "To the Toiling Muslims of Russia and East" that called to overthrow "the imperialist robbers and enslavers" found support among the broad Azeri community that was very distant from elitist intellectual discussions and simply tired of social and political turmoil.¹

Along with the promise to stop war and give land to those who cultivate it, the Bolsheviks promoted religious freedom as an important factor in national sovereignty. Lenin declared this Bolshevik program in his appeal to the peoples of the East: "Muslims of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirgiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks of Transcaucasia, Mountain peoples of the Caucasus – all those whose mosques and shrines have been destroyed, whose beliefs and customs have been crushed by the tsarist oppressive regime, listen to

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Ko vsem trudiashchimsia Musul'manam Vostoka*. Sovet Narodnykh Kommissarov, Council of People's Commissars, December 7, 1917. *Izvestiia*, 232, 1-2.

Bolsheviks. Since now and forever, your beliefs and customs are free and inviolable. Since now and forever you can build your life freely!”²

In particular, the Bolshevik program on the self-determination of Muslim peoples and their neighbors was important to Azeris. Having strong cultural connections with Iran and the Ottoman worlds, and being at war with Armenia, native politicians and intellectuals had to pay attention to the shift in regional power relations. Bolsheviks declared that they disapprove all treaties signed by Great Powers regarding the partition of Iran and Turkey promising to recognize all peoples’ right to determine the political future within the empires or outside.³ Moreover, the Bolsheviks supported this declaration by activating the local Communist cells and by sending military troops to the region. Hence, in 1920, many Azeris realized that the Bolsheviks had become a strong regional power and saw the need for cooperation to secure the safety of their nation.

It is important to admit that some Azeri intellectuals and politicians opposed the advance of the Bolshevik regime, seeing it as the continuity of Russian colonial rule, and left Soviet Azerbaijan for Iran and Turkey. In particular, A. Agayev, A. Huseynov, A. Dzhafar ogli, M. E. Rasulzade contributed significantly to the history of modern Turkey by becoming leading academics and politicians. Those who stayed in Azerbaijan after its Sovietization, in April 1920, had various motives for cooperating with the new regime. Some politicians and intellectuals, such as A. Karaev, Kh. Shabanova-Karaeva, Y. Vezirov, and others, came to Bolshevik ideals in the late 1910s, as a result of their alienation from the imperial regime and local parties such as Muslim Social Democratic, Hummet; pan-Islamist, Ittihad; and pan-Turkist, Geirat. Some, like D. Mamedkulizade, H. Javanshir, S. Efendiieva, and S. Akhundova, put their hopes in Bolshevik

²V. I. Lenin, *Ko vsem trudiashchimsia Musul'manam Vostoka*. Sovet Narodnykh Kommissarov, Council of People’s Commissars, December 7, 1917. *Izvestiia*, 232, 1-2.

³ V. I. Lenin, *Ko vsem trudiashchimsia Musul'manam Vostoka. To the Toiling Muslims of Russia and East*. Sovet Narodnykh Kommissarov, Council of People’s Commissars, December 7, 1917. *Izvestiia*, 232, 1 -2.

program for the promises of secularism, public enlightenment, and national self-determinism. Many accepting the new power simply tried to survive.

In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks needed and employed those Azeris who graduated from the Imperial public educational centres, and even *madrassah*. Bolsheviks needed the native intelligentsia for their knowledge and skills to become the intermediaries to promote the Bolshevik political agenda to broad Azeri masses in the native language. They became the Bolsheviks' manpower as teachers, civil servants, engineers, journalists, and writers. For the global perspective, due to their knowledge of Muslim cultures and regional languages, Azeri Communists and their sympathizers acquired an important role in conveying Bolshevik ideals to the Muslims of Iran, the Ottoman empire, and Afghanistan. In accordance with Lenin's view, the struggle for socialism in Russia could not succeed without the victory of socialism in other countries, and thus required the spread of revolutions worldwide. Hence, Azeri Bolsheviks became the emissaries of Communist ideology and Baku came to be the international hub for Communist indoctrination of Muslim peoples.

Russian Communist leaders organized the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku between 1–7 September, 1920. Nearly two thousand delegates came from more than twenty Eastern countries to discuss and define a common strategy to destroy imperialism and to endorse the world revolution. The Baku Congress's program stressed the need for national and anti-colonial revolutions and the necessity to foster a Muslim proletariat. In its final document, "Appeal to the Peoples of the East," the leaders of the Baku Congress directed the struggle of oppressed peoples entirely against Great Britain, a strong power particularly in Iran and Afghanistan. To increase anti-British sentiments, Moscow-based Communists organized a public funeral for twenty-six Baku Commissars killed by the British army in 1918. Communist leaders arranged the

reburial of those Commissars from Krasnovodsk, a town in Turkmenistan, to Azerbaijan, as a public demonstration. They made a documentary chronicle out of this ceremony aiming to propagandize it all over the world. With this act, the Bolsheviks created martyrs of imperialism, stressing that all of the victims were members of the international proletariat: Azeri Turks, Armenians, Russians, Georgians, and Jews.⁴

To attract Muslims, Bolshevik leaders also proclaimed that there was no contradiction between Islam and Communism. The leading Communists, Nariman Narimanov, Karel Radek, and Grigori Zinoviev, stated in their speeches that Communism is close to the principles of Islam, which means that no man may be a slave to another, and not a single piece of land may be privately owned.⁵ Azeri Communists, including A. Karaev, G. Musabekov, G. Sultanov, Agamali ogli, and others, also informed the delegates about the education and gender reformation that aimed to emancipate the most humbled stratum of traditional Muslim society – women.

Azeri Muslim women also had important roles in the Communist discourse on gender emancipation. In 1921, the all-Russian Communist leaders organized the First Congress of Eastern Women in Baku, inviting female delegates to discuss tactics to attract Muslim women into class struggle and to raise a female proletariat in the East. The final resolution of the Congress insisted on eternal class conflict, which does not know gender boundaries, to eradicate the remnants of patriarchal living, such as veiling, women's isolation, and early and polygamous marriages. To emancipate Muslim women gradually, Bolshevik authorities introduced gender-segregated clubs, literacy centres, and cooperative workshops and stores for Muslim women. They emphasized that one of the main goals of the Communist Party was to educate and empower Muslim women

⁴ *Stenographicheskii otchet Pervogo S'ezda Narodov Vostoka*, Petrograd, 1920, 1-201.

⁵ "Pervyi s'ezd narodov Vostoka" *Izvestiia*, September 21, 1920.

"Zadachi Pervogo s'ezda narodov Vostoka" *Pravda*, September 8–16, 1920.

through public schooling and labor outside the home. Furthermore, recognizing all religious matrimonial unions and training arranged before sovietization, Communist leaders stressed the peaceful character of their societal transformation. To propagandize this program in the Muslim East, Azeri female Communists acquired the leading roles and the Ali Bairamov Club became the model club to spread the knowledge about the Communist achievements in Muslim women emancipation.

This Bolshevik rhetoric on women's emancipation through universal education and the abolition of *Sharia* norms on family and female societal status echoed the old-Imperial modernist discourse. Many Azeri men and women became partners in the Bolshevik project to emancipate women by adjusting their pre-revolution agenda for societal modernization to Bolshevik state policy. It would be incorrect to state that there was a sharp division among the Azeri politicians and intellectuals who supported only the pro-Communist or pro-old-Imperial reformist discourses. In this work, I argue that the leading native Bolsheviks and their followers were the product of late-Imperial society, and that they came from elite families and accepted the ideas of Communism for their promise of social justice and gender equality.

I argue that Soviet Azeri political leaders developed their own synthesis between Communist goals and the modernizing aspirations of pre-revolution reformers, introducing their own agenda and ideals about the New Woman and *millat*. This synthesis is clearly seen in the Soviet Azeri-native leaders' program to modernize society ahead of the Moscow-sent directives, through the rapid abolition of the visible symbols of cultural backwardness, *chadra* and *papakh*. Azeri Soviet political and cultural leaders always juxtaposed their cultural achievements with the accomplishments in neighboring Iran and Turkey rather than in the Soviet Turkic republics which I consider as a continuity of the old-Imperial cultural connections among Muslim cultural

reformers. This connection is clearly seen in the advance of Muslim women female aviators in Azerbaijan, the only Muslim Turkic women in the family of Soviet female pilots, with similar projects initiated in Iran and Turkey.

Along with this, I consider the synthesis in the acts of the native *Zhenotdel* activists and *Sharg Gadini* editors to emphasize the traditional concept of female sexual honor, *namus*, while promoting the end of seclusion, literacy, and new women's rights in the family and society. The symbiosis of Communist and pre-revolution ideas can be also seen in the agenda of the Azeri Communists to abolish Arabic script, replacing it with Latin script but not Cyrillic. Azeri Soviet reformers considered this act to be the end of the power of conservative clerics and Russian colonialists and thus, promoted the agenda of the pro-Western, late-Imperial enlighteners. Hence, I recognize that Azeri Communists and their followers used the newly established government to revolutionize culture and society, an agenda they failed to achieve in the early 1900s. However, in 1929, the Stalinist regime redefined the liberal values of Communism and replaced the old Bolshevik leaders with a new generation of functionaries whose education and public activity had been shaped entirely within the Soviet milieu. The outcome of the Stalinist politics was catastrophic for the old Communists and those who collaborated with them. All of them, except D. Bairamova, S. Efendiieva, and Kh. Shabanova-Karaeva, were executed or perished in the GULAG camps.

The Stalinist regime, building a new world with new norms of socialization, education, and indoctrination, replaced all alternative cultural and political domains. As Stephen Kotkin says, Stalinism did not simply lay in the destruction of the society but in “the creation, along with such a state, of a new society – manifest in property relations, social structure, the organization of the

economy, political practice, and language.”⁶ The Stalinist regime, transforming village communities and forcing their inhabitants into collective farms, ended the social power of traditional leaders and replaced them with the new ones. To create new cultural values and a new intellectual elite, Stalinism also erased the old-Imperial cultural inheritance from public memory, replacing it with socialist ideology. Stalinist authority condemning the old-Imperial cultural achievements made it dangerous for those who collaborated with the regime to mention any progress other than Communist.

In particular, public schooling for Muslim girls at the Tagiev schools became excluded from public memory. No reader of the official biographies of A. Sultanova, K. Shabanova-Karaeva, G. Kadyrbekova, D. Bairamova, S. Efendiieva, S. Akhundova, and others, could have guessed that they were the graduates and teachers of these educational centres. In the late 1920s, these female activists defined the nature of the failure of the old-Imperial reformers to emancipate Muslim women and resist Soviet gender reforms as a class struggle, but not a cultural conflict. In their personal and official records, they claimed that only Communism could advance progress and rights for Muslim women.

Since the late 1920s, class struggle initiated by the socialist government, rather than cultural differences, led to a break with traditional norms on women in the family and society. With the introduction of the Five-Year Plan, 1928–1932, the new economic and political program which aimed to make the Soviet Union a competitive world power, the Stalinist government redefined female liberties. Like all women in the Stalinist state, Azeri Muslim women had to fulfill economic plans which became the new norms of women’s liberation. It evoked the liberal family legalizations of the early Bolshevik period and advanced a new image of femininity — a

⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 4

combination of a professional, highly-skilled woman and a happy mother who was offered, in the meantime, social protection by the state.

In interwar Turkey and Iran, gender reforms have also been closely related to political developments as well as with global modernization programs. The governments of both states were more concerned with granting women civic and political rights rather than elimination of the patriarchal foundations of Muslim societies. Their women's organizations had never been more professional than the Soviet *Zhenotdel* that introduced workers and instructors to achieve the emancipation of Azeri Muslim women in specifically established, male-free clubs, *artel's*, and cooperative stores. As a result, lacking state support to eradicate polygyny, bride prices, and seclusion, the women of Turkey and Iran focused on demanding legal and political equality rather than on the development of women's status in the private sphere. Over time, this gender program gave way to a feminist discourse and practice articulated within the Islamic and nationalist paradigms.

Epilogue: Independence and Azeri Women's New Challenges

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the newly independent Azerbaijan declared new "nationalizing" policy of national history, language, and family values. In the early 1990s, government leaders Elchibey (June 16, 1992 – September 1, 1993) and Heydar Aliyev (October 10, 1993 – October 31, 2003) welcomed Islam as part of a glorious national heritage and demonstrated their personal piety by performing the *hajj* or taking oaths on the Koran. They promoted the building of mosques and *madrassah* as a sign of national rebirth. However, this period of Islamic revival in the republic also culminated in a schism between traditional *Shia* Islam and *Wahhabism*, a fundamentalist current exported by *Sunni* Saudi Arab missionaries. In time, the latter Saudi Islamic influence became associated with threats of extremist ideology aiming to destabilize the regime and the region.

Increased contact with the Muslim world divided Azeri society between those who insisted on the continuity of the secular, pro-Western path and those who argued for the return of Islamic heritage and the *Sharia* norms, in particular related to the women's place in society and family. A new focus on Islamic observance brought the issue of women's veiling to the forefront of politics again. Thus, under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev (son of H. Aliyev, President of the republic since October 31, 2003 – till present), the government introduced cultural markers between local traditional and foreign expressions of Islam to homogenize society. The government of modern Azerbaijan accepted the colorful headscarf that leaves the face bare and outlawed the full veil, signifying the latter as an expression of Iranian influence and/or the extremism of *Wahhabism*. The majority of Azeri people support state regulation

outlawing religious garb in public institutions as a threat to traditional culture and the secularist values of the modern state.⁷⁸² However, the debates about Islamic norms of living and veiling which have emerged since 1990s continue to divide local society. It is important to note that those women who adopted religious norms do not participate in any public discussion on the role of Islam in the family and society, and male religious leaders represent their interests. Those Azeri feminists who participate in public discussions on women's societal position demand better state support of women and girls in the family and community, to control the rise of violence toward them.

The post-Soviet transition resulted not only in the revival of Islam and its gender norms. Most importantly, it resulted in a distraction of state programs that supported women in their roles as wives, mothers, and professionals. Considering Azeri women politically and socially equal with men, the government of modern Azerbaijan has not introduced any specific agency to monitor women's position in the family and society and to defend their rights. The absence of state support profoundly affected the number of women in political representation and led to a disproportionate level of female unemployment and the end of social benefits to assist women. Most importantly, it gave rise to officially promoted male societal privilege as a part of traditional Azeri culture.

⁷⁸² On Islam in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, see: A. Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); T. Swietochowski, "Azerbaijan: The Hidden Faces of Islam," *World Policy Journal* 19, no. 3 (2020): 69–76; B. Balci, "Between Sunnism and Shiism: Islam in post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 2 (2004): 205–217.

The question of gender equality, which was central in socialist Azerbaijan, became a part of the local UN-sponsored national non-government organizations that promote legal awareness and entrepreneurship and combat domestic violence and violence against women. This Western-supported discourse faces opposition from the newly emerged groups who claim they are returning to national traditions and *Sharia* gender norms and consider pro-Western influence as alien and harmful. Along with this, the state does extraordinarily little to support these NGO's programs to defend women's rights in the private and public spheres.

In 2010, the Azerbaijani government issued The Law On Prevention of Domestic Violence but did not synchronize it with the modern Criminal Code.⁷⁸³ The Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan Republic does not criminalize domestic violence and does not recognize violence towards women, seeing both of these issues first and foremost as family issues. Thus, prosecution depends on the will of the victim's family to proceed with the accusation. Also, "prosecution can only be brought if there is evidence physical violence resulted in injuries and death."⁷⁸⁴ This confusion in legal regulations diminishes the role of the state as a defender of women's rights and well-being and, moreover, resulted in the rise of patriarchy.

In accordance with the United Nations Special Report from 2013, the perpetrators are mainly intimate partners, but sometimes close male family members and family friends who commit physical, sexual, and psychological abuse against women. The United Nations Special Report stated that: "violence against women in Azerbaijan persisted because of the strong

⁷⁸³ The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prevention of Domestic Violence Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Azerbaijan at <https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/16419> (accessed April 14, 2020)

⁷⁸⁴ Azerbaijan Republic Criminal Code. Articles: 120, 132, 149 (Baku: September 2000).

patriarchal norms, deeply rooted gender stereotypes and customary practices that are harmful to women.”⁷⁸⁵ It concludes that, “The fear of retaliation and escalation of violence, shame and fear of impact on the family’s reputation, not being believed, being blamed, the belief that official reporting would not help (as reflected in the experiences of other women), the fear that it would end the relationship, and the fear of losing the children. Moreover, women who sought state assistance and services, or who left home at least for one night, suffered from increased violence and were concerned for their own and their children’s safety.”⁷⁸⁶

The official statistical data provided to the Special Rapporteur by the Ministry of Internal Affairs shows that from 1 January 2011 to 30 November 2013, there were 16,253 cases of crimes against women, of which 9,140 cases were classified as violence against women. The same source indicates seventy-six cases of rape during this period, as well as 193 killings of women. Along with this, the data shows the high prevalence of early and/or forced marriages in Azerbaijan: more than five thousand girls were the victims of early marriages in 2013 alone. The report stressed the difficulty of obtaining accurate statistics on early marriages, given their illegal nature.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo Human Rights Council, United Nation. (November 26–December 5, 2013), <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/country%20report/asia/azerbaijan/azerbaijan> (accessed April 14, 2020), 10–14.

⁷⁸⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo Human Rights Council, United Nation. (November 26–December 5, 2013), <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/country%20report/asia/azerbaijan/azerbaijan> (accessed April 14, 2020), 5–13.

⁷⁸⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo Human Rights Council, United Nation. (November 26–December 5, 2013), <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/country%20report/asia/azerbaijan/azerbaijan1> (accessed April 14, 2020), 14–20.

The Azerbaijan Human Development Report also registered a higher prevalence rate of intimate partner violence, twenty-six percent, among Internally Displaced People, IPD, and refugee women who had to flee their homes as a consequence of the conflict in and around the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, compared to respondents never subjected to forced displacement.⁷⁸⁸ The rise of crimes against women in their families and communities, and most important, the tolerance of these crimes, can be explained with several factors. First, with the end of Soviet rule and the transition from the planned socialist economy into a market economy, political and social insecurity left many men without stable income and undermined their societal position as main family providers and leaders. A second factor lies in the absence of strong government programs to defend women in the family and in a society that boosted the return of patriarchal relationships and the increase of gender-based violence.

According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in 2018, the data for the number of female victims was 915 reported cases of domestic violence and forty-two killings of women by male family members.⁷⁸⁹ Since 2019, Azerbaijani feminists organized several protest marches to denounce domestic violence and violence against women as a result of strong patriarchal culture and a lack of state support. They demanded from the government the implementation of The Law On Prevention of Domestic Violence, and

⁷⁸⁸ On the conflict in and around the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, please see UNSC resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of 1993 and UNGA Resolution 62/243 of 2008; Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo Human Rights Council, United Nation. (November 26–December 5, 2013), (accessed April 14, 2020), 24–26.

<https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/country%20report/asia/azerbaijan/azerbaijan>

⁷⁸⁹ The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Women and Men in Azerbaijan, 2019. <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en> (accessed April 18, 2020),

recognition the Council of Europe Convention on Prevention and Combat of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also called The Istanbul Convention. The latter will allow the criminalization of abuse toward women committed by men within and outside of the family. However, the government is deaf to the demands of Azeri feminists and always sends police military units to arrest female protest marchers.⁷⁹⁰ Hence, unlike the Azeri gender activists of the late-Imperial and Soviet periods, whose interests were promoted and defended by male intellectuals, politicians, and government, modern feminists are left alone in their struggle against the patriarchy.

⁷⁹⁰ “Police Briefly Detained Dozens at Feminist Rally in Azerbaijan, Release Them Outside Capital” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 9, 2020.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/police-briefly-detained-dozens-at-feminist-rally-in-azerbaijan-release-them-outside-capital> (accessed April 19, 2020).

“Feminist march in Baku: chanting over shouts of police” *Jam News*, March 8, 2020.

<https://jam-news.net/feminist-march-in-baku-chanting-over-shouts-of-police> (accessed April 19, 2020).

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Glossary

adat: patriarchal tradition

aga: a nobleman, a landlord

akhund: a *Shia* Islamic priest

alim: a man who has substantial Islamic education, a scholar

batrak, *batrachka* for female (Russian): landless peasant; equivalent *kesabchi* in Azeri

bek, *bei*: a nobleman, a landlord

Bilim Yurt: *House of Knowledge*; a teacher-training school

Bilim Chadyr: *A Tent of Knowledge*, a mobile training centre for the nomadic women and children

chadra: a veil that covered full female body

fetva: a decree made by a religious authority based on Islamic law

gadin: a woman

gazi: a judge in an Islamic court

gız: girl or daughter; an Azeri woman's full name was her given name, followed by her father's

gubernia (Russian): a major administrative subdivision in Russian empire, a province

hajj: annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca

haji: a person committed a pilgrimage to Mecca; a title put before the first name, Haji

Zeinalabdin Tagiev

hadith: a quotation, or an account of an incident in the life of the Prophet Muhammad or his followers, four righteous khalifs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, used as a source for Islamic law and practice

Hujum: attack; a campaign of cultural revolution and modernization in Azerbaijan and Central Asia, beginning in late 1926; in Uzbekistan it included public unveilings

imam: a member of the Islamic clergy and authority in the Muslim community

Jadid: a member of the late 19th and early 20th century reform movement among Russian Muslims best known for a commitment to modern education

kalym: bride wealth; a payment by the groom or groom's family to the parents of the bride; one of numerous gift transactions in the arrangement of a marriage

kelagaia: a traditional headscarf in bright colors

kesabchi: a poor person

kulak (Russian): a rich peasant, subject to dispossession in 1929 during the process of the Stalinist agrarian reform

Likbez: (Russian abbreviation of *likvidatsia bezgramotnosti*). A campaign to eradicate illiteracy among the Soviet people in 1920s

madrasah: an Islamic education centre that provides religious education beyond the primary level

mahr: "morning money" a traditional Islamic alimony paid to woman in divorce. Abolished by the Soviet regime in 1920s

maktab: an Islamic school providing basic instruction including reading and recitation of the Koran

millat: nation. In the early 20th century, Muslim reformers used this term to refer to all Russian Muslims as a political and cultural group. In the Soviet period, since 1920, the term became used as “nationality”

muallim: a teacher

mullah: an Islamic priest

namus: the traditional code of conduct in Azerbaijan that made women responsible for family honor through their chastity and modesty. *Namus* was strictly under the guardianship of male family members and its violation brought shame on the whole clan

obrazovannyi (Russian): a term used in Azeri language to describe a man who received education in Russian training centres in 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. In modern Azerbaijan, the division between those educated at Russian and Azeri schools still exist.

oblast' (Russian): region; in Azeri, *vilayet*

papakh: traditional male head wear

name, followed by -gizi. For example, Yelena Jahangir gizi

radzhbar: farmer, peasant; after 1930, a collective farm worker

Rett Olsun Chadra: in Azeri, *Veil Go Away*, a campaign for rapid chadra abolition, 1928 -1929

sigiah: a temporary marriage for the duration from three days to several months practiced by Shia Muslims

Sharia: Islamic law

shakird: a student

sheikh: Sufi master; among Sunni Muslim communities a religious authority

tarragiparver: a progressivist

ulama: Islamic religious scholars; men with significant religious education and high public reputation. In early 20th century, *ulama* promoted a reform of the Muslim community of believers, *umma*, through reformation of Islam. Unlike them, Jadids and Azeri reformers stood for the reformation of *millat* through the modern education

umma: the community of Muslims

usul-i-jadid: a new method in education based on teaching the modern subjects

vakila: in Russian *delegatka*; in the 1920s, a *vakila* was a woman elected by her community to attend training sessions so that she could become a political activist, a women's advocate in court, or a member of local government and village councils

vydvizhentsi: a worker promoted to the administrative post very quickly by joining the Communist Party often to replace the arrested intellectual or politician during the years of Stalin rulership

ZAGS: Soviet registry office that records all marriages, births, and deaths

ziiali: a member of the traditional Azeri intelligentsia