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The Past as Prologue? Challenging the Myth of the Subordinated, Docile Woman in Muslim Central Eurasia

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The most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved.

—LENIN

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the newly independent Central Eurasian states, like many other post-Soviet regimes, have sought to establish new national identities;¹ they have had to reconsider many of the old guiding principles and ideologies of the Soviet era and to articulate normative bases for social and political life. Some have called for a return to tradition, to an imagined pre-Soviet national past as the basis for national identity. The Soviet mythology of the emancipation of women, discussed in other chapters in this volume, has been among these old ideologies that have been questioned. As new states have undertaken the arduous tasks of nation building, some politicians have invoked “traditional” patriarchal gender relations as a more authentic alternative to the Soviet version of women’s emancipation. In Central Eurasia, such an imagined reconstruction has often been linked to Islam and its social and political role. Of course, debates about Islam and national identity and political development have a long history in the region. This chapter does not, however, focus on contemporary debates about gender politics and Islam or the gender politics of nation building, which are taken up in other chapters in this volume. Rather, it examines the transition to Soviet rule and the activism for women’s equality that had developed in Muslim

Central Eurasia in the early twentieth century as part of modernizing efforts to construct national identities. In particular, the chapter examines pre-Soviet reform movements, specifically those dealing with gender issues. It demonstrates that although their numbers were small, Muslim Central Eurasian women, working with their male compatriots, were important agents of change in the pre-Soviet period, reflecting a unique development in this Muslim majority region. The chapter thus emphasizes that Soviet representations of Muslim Central Eurasian women as historically docile, subordinated subjects, rather than as active participants in public life, masked political reality and distorted the history of gender relations in this region.

Why was the significance of these reform movements unrecognized and ignored? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the prevalent Soviet perspective. This chapter therefore begins with a brief overview of the Leninist view of Muslim Central Eurasian women and of their need for Soviet liberation. This view is then contrasted to the individual narratives of some Muslim Central Eurasian reformists, including the story of Rana, a remarkable woman I met in Turkey in the 1960s, and her husband, Raci, and Shefika Khanim (Gaspirinskaya) and her parents, Ismail and Zuhre. The experiences and activities of women like Rana and Shefika and their male reformist counterparts, however, were erased in a Soviet-era discourse that enshrined/reinforced Lenin's view of Muslim women. Thus, this chapter briefly discusses examples from both academic scholarship and fictional literature to illustrate the contours of this Soviet discourse. It then explores the development of the reform movement in Muslim Central Eurasia; it examines reformist beliefs in the power of education and the press to emancipate women, and in the necessity for women's political equality. Such attitudes could be seen not only in the actions of political activists but also in Muslim Central Eurasian literature of the pre-Soviet period. The efforts of these nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reformists began to have an impact as autonomous and independent polities were created in the region. The chapter documents some of the constitutional and legislative actions to promote women's rights taken by these new regimes, actions that could not be fully implemented due to the advancement of Soviet power into the region and the quashing of the new governments. Arguing that the reformist movement laid the groundwork for many of the Soviet-era policies on women's behalf, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the pre-Soviet reformist movements for gender politics in Central Eurasia today.

Myth Making and Breaking: Interrogating Soviet Constructions of Muslim Women

On April 10, 1921, the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* published Vladimir I. Lenin's special message to the Conference of Representatives of Women's Departments of the Peoples of Soviet Regions and Republics in the East, held in Moscow on April 5-7. Unable to attend the conference because of the pressures of other work, Lenin drew attention to the "cause of awakening the women of the East and uniting them organizationally."² Twelve years later, Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and close associate, explained Lenin's special interest in the women of the Soviet East:

Lenin warmly greeted the awakening of the women of the Soviet East. Since he attached a particular importance to raising the level of the nationalities that had been oppressed by tsarism and capitalism, it is quite understandable why he so warmly greeted the conference of delegates of the Women's Department of Soviet regions and republics in the East.³

Lenin's phrase "the most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved" about the Muslim women of the eastern regions of the prerevolutionary Russia became a frequently quoted slogan in Soviet, and even in some Western, discourse on gender politics in the Soviet period. In 1985, for example, the Soviet scholar Yelena Yemelyanova noted the poor status of women in the Eastern regions—that is, Muslim areas—of Russia before the October Revolution and Lenin's opinion of them: "The position of women in the outlying areas of the country with a non-Russian population was particularly difficult. Lenin said that before the Socialist Revolution the women of the East were the most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved" (1985, 9). Thus, in the realm of fiction, we find the emancipated "positive heroines" of the Soviet period in Uzbek and other Central Asian prose fiction. One of the fictional characters most commented upon as a positive female role model is Aikiz (Ayqiz) in the Uzbek novel *The Victors (Ghaliblar)*. Its author, Sharaf Rashidov (1917-1983), was the first secretary of the Uzbekistan Communist Party between 1959 and 1983. Rashidov introduces his heroine as follows:

She saw the village square and the white school-house she had gone to for eight years, the statue of Lenin and the red flag on the club house; this was the club where as a long-legged first-former, she had once recited poetry, more dead than

alive with stage fright, and later had made reports and presided at meetings. . . . This could hardly be called Aikiz's permanent home for she was away most of the time, either at her job or on lengthy business trips. Never before in this sub-mountain region had a young girl, a freshly graduated agronomist, been elected chairman of the village Soviet in preference to some man of experience and prestige. (Rashidov 1958, 8)

In the next few pages, she goes on horseback near the Kizilkum desert. This desert is described as the enemy of the farmers: "Aikiz thought apprehensively of the enemy lying low there in the west, crouching before its ominous leap" (Rashidov 1958, 10). Throughout the novel, Aikiz is portrayed as always worrying about how to turn this desert land into an irrigated expanse. Very little attention is given to her personal feelings and emotions. From the way she talks to other people and the way she thinks, it is hard to tell whether the fictional heroine Aikiz is a female character or even an individual having a distinct character of her own; that is, she is a "flat" character more than a "round" one. Furthermore, the love affair between Aikiz and Alimjan is narrated very weakly (Kocaoglu 1982, 93–96). Even when Aikiz is alone with her lover, Alimjan, instead of affection toward Alimjan, her mind is busy with other things and the orders given her by the local party officials:

Aikiz's eyes were on the tree, watching the chain of ants running up the rough bark.

—"Aikiz"—Alimjan called tenderly.

—"Yes, Alimjan?"

—"When will our wedding be?"

Aikiz touched the tree and instantly two ants climbed on to her finger; flustered and confused they hurried up her arm.

She looked at Alimjan with a cunning twinkle in her eyes:

—"Imagine talking about it in the middle of the street"—she said.—"Don't you know it isn't done? And then look, see all those people waiting for me at the village Soviet?" (Rashidov 1958, 34)

Throughout the novel, she talks and delivers speeches just like the party officials' speeches that were being published daily in the Soviet press. Aikiz is not concerned with feelings and emotions such as love, affection for the homeland, or the beauty of nature, but with a struggle against nature and

with party discipline, it seems. The closing passage of the novel is revealing in demonstrating Aikiz's attitude toward nature. She belittles the moonbeams while praising electricity:

Aikiz and Alimjan walked arm in arm. They came out on the highroad and turned towards the village. There was Altyn-Sai before them, flooded with electricity against which the pale beams of the moon were impotent. The lights radiated in straight, slender lines towards the centre of the village where they became intricately interwoven.

—"Look at all those lights" Aikiz said. "How bright they are: It's the light of Communism shining on us from tomorrow. Oh, Alimjan-aka, all this happiness is ours." (Rashidov 1958, 201)

It is true that some Uzbek critics have found fault with the portrayal of Aikiz in the novel, calling it very artificial: "By the way, it should be noted that there are certain artificial elements in the characterization of Aikiz" (Eshimov 1968, 32). Yet Eshimov also praises Rashidov for his success in creating a positive heroine like Aikiz and advises other Uzbek writers to take Aikiz as a model for their own positive heroes and heroines (Eshimov 1968, 33, cited in Kocaoglu 1982, 95-96).

Among the Soviet scholarship dealing with Muslim women, the works of two Uzbek scholars, Rahima Aminova (1977) and Diloram Alimova (Alimova 1987, Alimova and Azimova 2000), stand out. Aminova's writing focuses on women's liberation in Uzbekistan; however, it systematically ignores the major political and social activities of Central Asian women and men to advance women's liberation in the pre-Soviet period. Aminova's work, originally published in Russian, found favor among party officials, who had it translated into English, published by the prestigious Nauka publishing house in Moscow in the series of the Central Department of Oriental Literature, and distributed worldwide. A short presentation introduces the book to the readers:

This book deals with the radical changes in women's status in Central Asia (specifically in Uzbekistan) following the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917. Written by an Uzbek scholar, it describes the difficult and painstaking work of the Communist Party and the Soviets in the territory of Uzbekistan aimed at securing women's equality not merely before the law, but also in actual life. (Aminova 1977, 2)

In her introduction, Aminova assigns the main reason for the inferior status of women in Central Asia to “ruthless feudal and colonial oppression,” which she claims blocked any progress toward the emancipation of women. After giving credit to several Central Asian poets between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries for having spoken on behalf of women’s rights, she skips the activities and achievements of women in pre-Soviet Central Asia between 1900 and 1920 and jumps directly to the Soviet period:

Progressive thinkers in Uzbekistan—Navoi, Nodira, Mukimi, Furqat, and others—made attempts at upholding the rights of woman as a human being and spoke out against the brutal customs that reduced her to the status of a slave. Their efforts, however, with feudal-clerical reaction rampant, were doomed to failure. Only with the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917 and the implementation of Lenin’s programme of socialist construction under the leadership of the Communist Party it became possible to fully solve the women’s question in Central Asia. (Aminova 1977, 4)

In her entire book of 238 pages, she never mentions any indigenous activity or contribution to the advancement of women’s rights between 1900 and 1920. In her conclusion, she describes the pre-Soviet period as completely dark concerning women’s emancipation in order to hail later Soviet achievements in this regard:

The enormous contrast between the miserable existence of the downtrodden woman, a virtual slave in pre-revolutionary Turkistan, and the free, purposeful and manifold creative activity of the woman in Uzbekistan, who enjoys every civil right, offers the most convincing proof that the successful emancipation of women is possible in a developing country. (Aminova 1977, 220)

Thus, for Aminova and other Soviet scholars, the mention of any progressive development in the pre-Soviet period might undermine the accomplishments and glory of the Soviet period.

Dilarom Alimova’s case is very interesting because of the drastic change of her position on the woman issue in pre-Soviet Central Asia between the time her book was published in the Soviet period (Alimova 1987) and her later writings of the post-Soviet period (Alimova 1998; Alimova and Azimova 2000). In the 1987 Russian-language book *Zhenskii vopros v srednei Azii: Istorii izucheniia i sovremennye problemy* (The woman question in Central Asia: the history

of studies and contemporary problems), Alimova praises even harsh Soviet measures to emancipate women in Central Asia, but in the post-Soviet era, she begins to express critical views on her earlier work and the Leninist discourse on Central Asian women (Alimova 1998; Alimova and Azimova 2000). In the late Soviet period, she acknowledges the Soviet discourse that the Soviet campaign of the forceful unveiling of the Muslim Central Asian women in 1929–1941 was a class struggle:

Campaign “khujum” was accompanied by the intensification of the class struggle. The growing activity of women and the dropping of *parandja* [a traditional of women and girls] met bitter resistance of conservative elements. Mullahs, top Muslim clergy [*ishans*], and rich men [*bay*] terrorized those who laughed to step over the age-long foundations of the Islamic Law [Shariat]. The tops of clergy provoked irresponsible part of the terroristic acts by the population. (Alimova 1987, 31)

According to the inside front cover note by the publisher, the History Institute of the Academy Sciences of Uzbekistan, the book was prepared for “specialists and historians as well as instructors and the university students,” which explains its propagandistic tone and rhetoric. Because of Soviet press censorship, it is impossible to know what Alimova’s actual thinking on topic was in 1987.

Her English-language articles published in the West after the fall of the Soviet Union, however, critically question her previous Soviet position. In an article published in the journal *Central Asian Survey*, Alimova criticizes the former Soviet doctrine that the emancipation of women was a part of class struggle in Central Asia:

The class approach was the leading theme of all transactions and visions, handed down from the upper echelons of the party who put a label on this process: the enemies of “Khudjum” are the clergy and the rich people. However, the war over women was not a war of classes but one of mentalities. It did not depend on the social extraction of people who found it very hard to reject a conception of women’s destiny which was established in the course of centuries. Confirmation of this statement may be found in the tragic events that often occurred in the families of poor people. The crude and misguided working methods of the party committees provoked this war. For instance, the agitation in favour of “Khudjum” took place at residents’ meetings in mosques for prayer, special groups for taking off the *paranja* were organized by the head of the police who obtained undertakings from husbands to unveil their wives. These kinds of coercive methods exerted

a negative influence on the women's movement itself which started to decline.
(Alimova 1998, 151)

In her later coauthored article in a Western study on the gender issue in Central Asia, Caucasus, and Turkey published in 2000, Alimova repeated her stand that the Soviet experiment concerning women emancipation had serious problems:

Forcefully imposed emancipation had tragic results. Without rejecting achievements such as cultural revolution, increasing educational level and the economic participation of women, we would argue that the policy of using women as a cheap labor force and equalizing their labor with that of men in the 1930s-40s had very negative consequences. This policy continued until the 1980s. The position of the rural women is particularly noteworthy. They suffered from the negative consequences of cotton monoculture. The major emphasis was made on the full participation of women in public production and the most important indicator was quantity. (Alimova and Azimova 2000, 294)

Unlike the former Soviet official line, which ignored pre-Soviet activities concerning the promotion of gender equality in Central Asia and among the Muslims of Tsarist Russia, Alimova now gave credit to the earlier Reformist (Jadidist) movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prior to the Soviet period:

It would be incorrect to consider that discussions on the emancipation of women started with the October revolution. The revolution was an upheaval, a forceful penetration of the Bolshevik rule, and was supposed to have raised the question of women's emancipation in the East for the very first time. Actually, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the progressive movement of national intelligentsia, which was called "Jadidism," laid out the question of women's participation in public social and cultural life in its program of renewal and social reconstruction. (Alimova and Azimova 2000, 292)

Of course, the Soviet regime did effect a dramatic transformation of women's social position throughout the region. However, the main logic behind Lenin's message, Krupskaya's follow-up remarks, and later Soviet discursive strategy was to amplify the achievements of the Soviet period in gender issues as if they had been initiated for the first time in history. The Soviet-era attitude of ignoring any pre-Soviet-period modernization effort or reformist movement was even carried on in some Western academic writings.⁴ It led a few scholars to ignore or bypass

any reference to pre-Soviet-period Muslim reformist ideas and movements. For example, one contemporary British scholar of Central Asia, when commenting on the Soviet transition of Central Asia, presents modernization simply as a Soviet introduction to the area by neglecting previous developments:

Under Soviet rule, Central Asia underwent an intensive process of modernization. In effect, the region was wrenched out of Asia and thrust into Europe. Traditional culture was either destroyed or rendered invisible, confined to the most intimate and private spheres. In the public arena, new national identities were created, underpinned by newly fashioned languages and Western-style literatures and histories. (Akiner 1997, 261)

In reality, however, Western-type modern education was first introduced by Muslim reformist educators and intellectuals in the privately run Jadid schools in the Muslim areas of Tsarist Russia, including the Crimea, the Volga-Ural region, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia, prior to the Soviet period. These schools operated from the 1880s until the early 1920s before they were closed in favor of Soviet schools. Further, the depiction of the pre-Soviet past as solely “traditional” or “Islamic” and the Soviet period as “modern” and “Western” is also a misrepresentation of Central Eurasian history, since a deep confrontation existed between the “conservative traditionalism” represented by the Islamic clergy and the “modernization” perspective initiated by reformist (Jadid) intellectuals from the mid-nineteenth century until the Soviet period. Contrary to the above scholar’s claim that “Western-style literatures” were introduced only in the Soviet period, there is a very rich literature in modern genres such as plays (dramas), short stories, novels, and poetry initiated by Muslim reformist writers in the various parts of Tsarist Russia, including Central Asia, between 1850 and 1917, long before the introduction of Soviet rule.⁵

In fact, Muslim Central Eurasia, as the largest region of the Islamic world, has a relatively long history of modernization starting in the late nineteenth century. Appreciation of this history of pre-Soviet Central Eurasia not only enables a more accurate evaluation of Soviet achievements but also, as important, an assessment of the widespread mythology of the oppressed, docile Muslim Central Eurasian woman. Interrogation of this one-sided depiction of the past reveals that Central Eurasia’s historical experience does not simply serve as a source of tradition but also of reform and progressivism. The gender reforms that took place during the pre-Soviet period differed from those in the Soviet era: unlike the top-down, externally imposed Communist changes, pre-Soviet Central

Eurasian reforms were carried out by a group of indigenous male and female intellectuals working at the grassroots level. Their efforts deserve attention, as they may serve as a model for Central Eurasian societies as they pass through another transition in their political, social, and gender relations.

Of course, Soviet-created myths were not only limited to the pre-Soviet past of the Muslim peoples of Central Eurasia; they also applied to pre-Soviet Russian society, where the narrative of Soviet modernization and reform was promulgated. In the Stalin period and for a while thereafter, it was claimed that the “woman question” had been “solved” in Soviet society (Edmondson 1992, 2).⁶ This Soviet account did not go uncontested. There is a rich academic literature dealing with the history of the modernization drive and reforms of the pre-Soviet Russian past that challenges Soviet myths about this period and disputes Soviet claims about women’s liberation under Communism (see, for example, Stites 1978; Edmondson 1984, 1992, 2001; Clements 1979; Clements et al. 1991; Ruthchild 1993; Pushkareva 1997; and McDermid and Hillyar 1998; Lapidus 1978). Specific to Central Eurasia, the modernization efforts and reform movements of the pre-Soviet period of the Muslim Central Eurasia were fairly treated in Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay (1964, 1967), Allworth (1967, 1973, 1990, 1994), Brower and Lazzarini (1997), Khalid (1998, 2007), Roy (2000), and Kocaoglu (2001). The issue of gender politics in both the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods was also treated well in Massel (1974), Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu (1998), Hablemitoglu (2004), Northrop (2004), Noack (2000), Heyat (2002, 2005), and most recently in Kamp (2006) and Roy (2007). Among them, the Turkish-language source (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998) is particularly valuable, since it includes the texts and facsimiles of both valuable publications and original handwritten documents related to the congresses and activities of the Muslim (Turkic) reformists in the tsarist period. This chapter now turns to the individual efforts of such reformist activists and their struggle for woman’s rights in pre-Soviet Central Eurasia from the mid-nineteenth century until early 1920s before the tightening grip of Soviet power in the region.⁷

Challenging the Myth: Individual Reformists’ Lives

When I was a youth in Istanbul, Turkey, in the 1960s, I first encountered Rana, a Central Asian woman, and her husband, Raci (pronounced as “Rahji”), a Turkish man. Their fascinating life stories captured my imagination, and Rana’s experiences provided ample evidence of the reformist activism of some



Rana in 1917 in Tashkent. *Source:* Author's collection.

Central Eurasian women. Rana was born in 1900, and at the age of eighteen was appointed Russian-language teacher at the native Turan Elementary School in the Beshagach district of Tashkent, where she met her future husband, a music teacher.⁸ Rana was a Muslim Uzbek, while Raci was a fugitive ex-Ottoman Turkish officer who became a prisoner of war captured by the tsarist Russian army in Ardahan city during the Turko-Russian war of 1915. After spending two years in various Russian prison camps in the Caucasus, Raci, along with other Turkish officers and soldiers, was finally sent to the Krasnoyarsk prison camp in southern Siberia. A year later, with the help of local Tatar businessmen and intellectuals, Raci and several other Turkish officers escaped the camp. After a long journey through the steppes and desserts of today's Kazakhstan, they reached the city of Tashkent. There he found several other groups of Turkish officers who had also run away from other Russian prison camps. The Turkish officers helped Raci and



Rana with a group of male teachers at the Turan secondary school in Tashkent (1919). Her husband, Raci, is standing behind her. She was never veiled. *Source:* Author's collection.



Rana in the summer palace of the former amir of Bukhara used by the new government of Bukhara (1920). The third man from the left and next to the piano is Qari Yoldash, the minister of education. *Source:* Author's collection.

his friends to get jobs in local schools, but these positions were in the modern schools in Tashkent being operated by native Central Asian intellectuals, in contrast to the Russian *tyuzemni* schools for the natives of Central Asia. After a year of friendship, Raci and Rana decided to marry. However, in 1920 it became dangerous for Raci, as an ex-Ottoman officer, to live in Tashkent; so they decided to move to the newly established independent republic of Bukhara. In Bukhara, Rana continued to work as a Russian-language teacher in various schools in the area, while Raci created and trained the military band of the Bukharan army. In 1923, conditions in Bukhara also deteriorated for the couple, as Bukhara and the rest of Central Asia were falling under the heavy grip of the Soviet Union. Rana and Raci decided to leave Bukhara and moved to Turkey. On the ship from Batum to Istanbul, Rana gave birth to their daughter (Kocaoglu 1987). In Turkey, she continued her profession as a Russian-language teacher and began to work translating into Turkish the novels, stories, and plays of various Russian writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenyev, and Chekhov.

While detailed information about Rana's early life is limited, it is nonetheless possible to draw her portrait as representing the rare educated Muslim young woman who played an active role in the education of the native peoples during the extremely troubled years of the transition from the tsarist Russian rule to the short-lived independent republics of Bukhara and Kharazm from 1920 to 1923 and into the Soviet period. Rana definitely was one of that small number of fortunate women who lived in big cities like Tashkent, which afforded some opportunities for women like her, the daughter of lower-middle-class but educated parents. Her social status was entirely different than that of many of her contemporaries because of her education and profession. Rana was unique in that she was free to choose her husband and did not have a traditional arranged marriage. Her case clearly counterbalances the Soviet official claim that women were emancipated for the first time only under the Soviet rule in Muslim Central Eurasia. In fact, Rana was a perfect model of the "enlightened (progressive) women" that had been dreamed about since the late nineteenth century by Muslim reformist intellectuals and politicians such as Ismail Gaspirinski (1851–1914) and his daughter, Shefika Khanim (1886–1975), in Crimea; Hasan Melikov-Zardabi (1842–1907) in Azerbaijan; and Ahmad Mahzum Danish (1817–1896), Mahmud Khoja Behbudi (1875–1919), and Munavvar Qari (1878–1931) in Central Asia.⁹

Shefika Khanim, born in Bahchesaray in 1886 and died in Ankara in 1975, was one of the pioneers of the women's movement in Muslim Central Eurasia and a key participant at some of the major Muslim congresses. Her father was an educated person, but so was her mother, Zuhre Khanim, who was also an

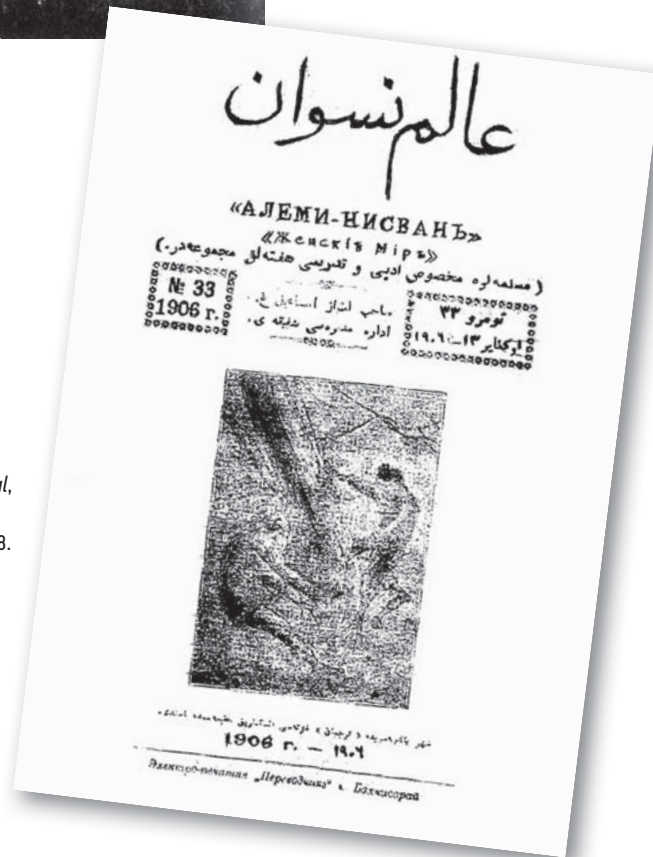
important figure among the early Muslim female reformists. The marriage of Ismail Gaspirinski and Zuhre Khanim is also very interesting from the vantage of the changes in women's status from the traditional way of life in Muslim Central Eurasia. Ismail's first marriage lasted only two years and ended in divorce, but his second was a case of secret love. His second wife, Zuhre, was the daughter of a rich Tatar family from Kazan. During young Zuhre's visit to Yalta city in Crimea with her uncle for two months in the summer of 1881, she became acquainted with Ismail at someone's house. The two fell in love. After Zuhre returned to Kazan, the lovers wrote letters to each other and even met in secret several times. Finally, they decided to marry. But when Zuhre's father, Isfandiyar Akchurin, rejected this marriage due to Ismail's poor economic conditions, Zuhre and Ismail secretly married; eventually her father accepted the relationship.

It is said that Zuhre gave her husband her expensive jewelry collection to sell and finance the private publishing house and the famous newspaper *Terjuman* (Translator) that Ismail wanted to publish. Later Zuhre helped her husband by acting as the newspaper's account manager, translator, and secretary, as well as the clerk who wrote the addresses of the subscribers on the envelopes for the post office. With the extraordinary effort by both husband and wife, between 1883 and 1918 their newspaper reached thousands of readers from the Crimea to various parts of Tsarist Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Europe, the Middle East, India, China, Japan, and even the United States.¹⁰ When Zuhre died in 1903, her daughter, Shefika, started to help her father in the preparation and publication of the newspaper. Later, Shefika would become the editor of the first women's journal, *Alem-i Nisvan* (Women's World), which began publishing in 1906. Ismail Gaspirinski, who was very lucky to receive help from both his wife and daughter, later wrote an article entitled "One Wing Bird Can't Fly," referring to the significant role of women in helping men to enlighten society and conduct reforms in social, economic, cultural, and political fields (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 15-17).

Apart from the unusual marital team of Ismail Gaspirinski and Zuhre Khanim, another major reformist leader in Azerbaijan, Hasan Bey Melikzade Zardabi's marriage was also an odd case for the general arranged marriages of his time. When Hasan Zardabi (1842-1907) saw the name of an Azerbaijani girl in the list of high school graduates in Tbilisi in a newspaper in 1870, he immediately went to the city to find the girl named Hanife. At their first meeting, he proposed marriage to her. At first, the girl's family, relatives, and friends raised eyebrows at this strange proposal, but upon the insistence of their daughter, the family finally accepted the marriage (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 64-65).



Shefika Khanim (1886–1975), chief editor of the first woman's journal, *Alem-i Nisvan* (Woman's World) and the most prominent women reformist in Muslim Central Eurasia. After she had to leave her homeland Crimea (late 1918) and also Azerbaijan (1921), she spent rest of her life in Turkey. Source: Ismail Gaspirinski Web site: www.iccrimea.org/gaspirali/index.html.



Women's World Journal, no. 33 (1906). Source: Hablemitoglu 1998: 538.



Shefika Khanim (*right*) with other two prominent women reformist leaders, Zeyneb Amirhan (*left, in white shirt*) and Ilhamiye Toktar (*center*), in the early 1900s in Crimea. *Source: Hablemitoglu 1998: 430.*

While Hasan Zardabi published the reformist newspaper *Ekinji* (1875–1977) and contributed to the development of Azerbaijani theater, his wife, Hanife Zardabi, became the director of the private girls' school in Baku sponsored by the famous Azerbaijani oil industrialist Haji Zeynelabidin Tagiyev (1840–1924) (Heyat 2002, 49, 66–69, 74–76).

The lives of Rana, Shefika Khanim [FIG 6], and the other reformists throw into question the Leninist account of Muslim Central Eurasian women's docile subordination and the implicit reactionary conservatism of Muslim Central Eurasian men. They suggest that, even if not widespread, reformist efforts on behalf of women did occur during the pre-Soviet period and in fact formed a base for policies of women's emancipation in the Soviet era.

Challenging the Myth: Central Eurasian Reformism

The roots of reformism in tsarist-era Muslim Central Eurasia can be found in four important cultural regions: the cities of Baku and Tbilisi in Transcaucasia; the cities of Simferopol (Akmesjit) and Bakhchesaray in the Crimea; the cities of Kazan and Ufa in the Volga-Ural; and the cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent in Central Asia (Turkistan). Among these four cultural regions,



The Ayshe Ishakova Kindergarten-Teacher's Training School in Akmesjit (Simferopol) in Crimea (1917).
 Source: Hablemitoglu 1998: 436.

Transcaucasia was the most prosperous in terms of material wealth thanks to the advanced oil industry of Baku since the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, regardless of resources, between the 1860s and the 1910s, various groups of reformist intellectuals—among them scholars, journalists, writers, and politicians—had already started to engage in cultural, social, and political reform activities, particularly in the cities of Simferopol, Kazan, Ufa, Baku, Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand.

By the early twentieth century, the situation across the empire was ripe for reformist movements. With the establishment of a constitutional monarchy following the 1905 revolution, the Russian tsar was forced to hold elections for the Duma and the State Assembly, and he promised not to interfere with legislation. In the atmosphere of freedom that began with the tsar's manifesto, many political parties, organizations, and publications came to life. This situation in Russia encouraged the Muslim Turks as well. The first political party among the Azerbaijanis was *Himmet*, which initially acted as a branch of the Social Democratic Party in Russia. In 1904, several new political parties appeared in Azerbaijan, such as *Hurriyet* (Freedom) and *Ittifaq* (Unity).

In addition to the political changes in Russia, political developments in the Ottoman Empire also influenced the Muslim Turks in Russia. In particular, the Young Turks (*Jeunes Turcs* in French) movement was closely followed by the

Muslims Turks of Russia. Starting as separate small secret societies, the Young Turks movement can be traced as far back as 1889. With their grand conference in 1902 in Paris, two major political divisions appeared among the members of the various Young Turks societies: one political faction supported the centralization of the Ottoman Empire (?????????) while another faction had the idea of the decentralization of the Ottoman Empire (Liberal Unionists). The successes of the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire in the later years inspired such secret societies among the various Muslims Turks in Russia as the “Young Tatars” in Crimea, the “Young Bukharans” in the Emirate of Bukhara, and the “Young Khivans” in the Khanate of Khiva in the 1910s. Actually, there was reciprocal influence between the intellectuals of the Muslims of Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The noted scholars on Islam in Russia, Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quellejey, remark that “for Russia’s Muslims, the Young Turks revolution, even more than the Russian revolution of 1905, was a triumphant and clear demonstration of the fact that a democratic movement could prevail over autocracy. At the same time, while the national movement in Russia was powerfully inspired by the Turkish revolution, it exercised in its turn, particularly after 1905, an influence which was sometimes decisive on the political life of the Ottoman Empire” (1967, 34). Indeed, during the waning years of the Russian empire, when many Central Eurasian Turkic intellectuals had to escape from the tsarist empire to the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, they had a very strong impact on the Ottoman reformist intellectuals.

The Roots of Jadidism: Women, Education, and the Press

Not surprisingly, given the work of these reformists, Central Eurasia during the pre-Soviet period, like the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, saw changes in gender politics; however, there are substantial differences between the modernizations of the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods. First of all, the modernization drives in the pre-Soviet period were carried out by the initiatives of small groups of native reformist individuals in various parts of Muslim Central Eurasia, while those of the Soviet period were imposed by an alien and central power, the Soviet authority, on the native peoples, sometimes by violent force. Second, the native reformists, mostly male but a few female, strongly believed that real women’s emancipation in the Muslim parts of Tsarist Russia could be achieved in three ways: through gradual reforms in the education of both men and women in modern schools of that time (the reformist Jadid schools); through dissemination of reformist ideas

among the Muslim peoples via private newspapers and journals, which were increasing in number and distribution between 1883 and 1917, and finally through the establishment of democratic governments and states for Muslims both in the territories of Tsarist Russia and the protectorate states of Bukhara and Khiva.¹¹

The roots of Muslim Turkic women's modern education and activism go back to the second half of the nineteenth century with the start of the reform modernization drive. At the beginning, reform movements among the peoples of Muslim Central Eurasia were based, on the one hand, on their opposition to Russian domination and, on the other hand, by their acquaintance with reform movements in the Ottoman Empire. However, reform movements first began in the Volga Ural region (Kazan, Ufa), the Crimea, and Azerbaijan and later expanded to Central Asia (the Steppe provinces and Turkistan, the Emirate of Bukhara, and the Khanate of Khiva). Reform movements developed through the press and education. In terms of press influence, the bilingual newspaper *Tercüman/Prevodchik* (Translator) in Crimean Turkish and Russian from 1883 to 1918 played the most vital role for the development of the native press in Muslim Central Eurasia prior to the Soviet period. The reformist Ismail Gaspirinski also started the first women's journal *Alem-i Nisvan* (Women's World) in 1906 and made his daughter, Shefika Khanim, its editor.

In education, already acquainted with Russian schools, the Muslim Turks wanted to establish their own New Method (Usul-i Jadid) schools in their native tongue, but they designed them differently from their Traditional Method (Usul-i Kadim) schools. The influence of Ismail Gaspirinski was very great in the rapid spread of the New Method Jadid (Reformist) schools with modern education from Bahchesaray, Crimea, to Kazan, Baku, Tashkent, and Bukhara instead of the traditional Muslim schools under heavy religious education. Between 1898 and 1908, there were 102 New Method elementary schools and two New Method junior high schools in the Turkistan General Governorship of Tsarist Russia, six New Method elementary schools in the Emirate of Bukhara, and six New Method elementary schools in the Khanate of Khiva. In order to support the New Method schools, the Bukharan reformist intellectuals and businessmen founded a company, *Shirkat-i Bukhara-i Sharif* (Company of Noble Bukhara), in March 1909, which posed as a trading company but was actually a political organization (Ayni 1963, 202).¹² This company secretly provided textbooks and other supplies for the New Method Jadid schools (d'Encausse 1988, 87–88).

Secrecy was required because reformist (Jadid) educators and intellectuals were facing severe difficulties and ill-treatment in their drive to expand modern education in their New Method schools, since both tsarist colonial authorities



The Ismail Gaspirinski Teacher's College in Akmesjit (Simferepol) in Crimea (1918). This college was run by two female directors: Shefika Khanim (Ismail Gaspirinski's daughter) and Ilhamiye Toktar. *Source:* Hablemitoglu 1998: 453.



Girls elementary school in Kostruma (Siberia, 1917). *Source:* Hablemitoglu 1998: 434.

and regional feudal rulers, like those of the Emirate of Bukhara, joined together to prevent any reforms. Tsarist administrators and Bukharan emirs supported the conservative Muslim clergy against the reformist Muslim intellectuals (Khalid 1998, 300). Allworth gives information on the attitudes and actions of both Muslim conservative clergy and the tsarist Russian officials toward the New Method (modern) schools opened by the Muslim intellectuals in Central Asia:

Even a small number of New Method schools frightened them [the clergy] in Bukhara and in Turkistan, just as they did most Russian officials. The establishment's anxiety became obvious when the Russian authorities in Turkistan closed more than 50 New Method schools during the 1910/11 school year. . . . The Amir of Bukhara in the 1913/14 school season closed all New Method schools known in the amirate. (Allworth 1990, 139–140)

Despite these pressures, interest in New Method education remained strong. One of the leading reformists in the Emirate of Bukhara, Osman Khodja (1878–1968), visited Bahchesaray in 1909 on his way to Istanbul and met with Ismail Gaspirinski. After studying the essential methodology of the Jadid schools with him, Osman Khodja went to Istanbul and studied the modern Ottoman school system there. Meanwhile, he and his other colleagues from Bukhara, such as Abdurrauf Fitrat (1886–1938), founded the Charity Society of Bukhara for Dissemination of Education on October 26, 1909.¹³ The aim of the organization was to bring students from the Emirate of Bukhara and other parts of Turkistan (Central Asia) to continue their education in the schools of Istanbul.

After returning to Bukhara two years later, Osman Khodja immediately opened a Jadid school in his house and started to serve first the children of his relatives and later other people. When Osman Khodja and other “Young Bukharan” revolutionary group members deposed the emirate regime and established the democratic republic of Bukhara (1920–1923), Khodja first became the minister of finance in 1920 and later the president of the republic in 1921 (Kocaoglu 2001, 36–37).¹⁴

Not surprisingly, given Osman Khodja's role in the new government, one of the first moves taken in this short-lived non-Soviet republic was to open modern schools where both male and female students sat in classes side by side. The Bukharan government also sent three groups of high school graduates to three key cities for university education in 1921: Moscow, Berlin, and Istanbul. After the abolition of the independent republic of Bukhara by the Soviets in 1924 and later after World War II, only a few of the students who received B.A. and

doctorate degrees in Berlin and Istanbul dared to return to Uzbekistan. Those who did return were later either jailed or sent to Siberia, where they served in the labor fields because the Soviet government suspected that they might have been indoctrinated while studying in Berlin and Istanbul.¹⁵

Muslim reformist intellectuals especially focused on the emancipation of Muslim women in their discourse and activities because they understood that without gender equality and liberation, their modernization drive could not be successful. This position was reflected in a journal article by a male reformist in 1913 in Baku, Azerbaijan: “Whoever loves his own people and wishes it a [great] future, must concern himself with the enlightenment and education of women, restore freedom and independence to them, and give wide scope to the development of their minds and capabilities” (Lazzerini 1973, 237). This writer’s call is echoed more bluntly in a letter to the editor by Hariye Hanim Machabili in the newspaper *Tercüman/Prevodchik* (Translator) in Crimea in 1913: “Our rights are clearly defined in the Kor’an and in the sayings of the prophet. But, you [men], in the name of religion, are oppressing us; in the name of Shariat [Islamic law] you are destroying us. . . . Who will suffer and lose out because of this? Again it will be you [men]” (Lazzerini 1973, 237). Adeeb Khalid, in his excellent study on the politics of Muslim reformism (Jadidism) in Central Asia, summarizes the main trend in the Jadids’ writings in the pre-Soviet period:

They are marked by a great sympathy for women and a concern for bettering their position. Again, the inspiration came from Tatar and Ottoman debates. Magazines by and for women, such as *Alem-i Nisvan* (Women’s World), edited by Gaspirinski’s daughter Shefika Khanim in Bahchesaray, and *Suyüm Bike*, which appeared in Kazan from 1913 to 1917, had created a women’s voice in the new discourses of the nation then being articulated. Veiling had disappeared among the Tatars by the turn of the century, and Tatar women in Central Asian cities were visible symbols of the change local Jadids wanted to bring about in their society; and to the extent that women had a voice in this debate, Tatar women were also agents of reform. (1998, 223)

Later, however, Khalid states that “unveiling was never explicitly raised in Central Asia before 1917, and Jadid attitudes on gender issues remained conservative” (1998, 228). It is understandable that the Central Asian reformist (Jadidist) intellectuals who were under severe attacks by the Islamic clergy and conservative circles in their societies must have realized that it was not the right time to debate the “unveiling of women” issue openly in the press.

Reformist Writers: Ideas on Education and Unveiling

The emphasis of Muslim reformists on the education of both males and females as the primary prerequisite for modernization, of course, found its way into literary works. Poems written by reformist writers in many regions of Muslim Central Eurasia between 1900 and 1920 call attention to the education of men and women. There are many stories, novels, and plays with plots that idealize educated young women in contrast to the illiterate young men who lead their communities into misery and downfall. In the novel *Unlucky Girl Jamal* (*Baxtsiz Jamal*), by the reformist Kazak writer Mirjakib Duwlat-uli (1885–1938), who was killed during the Stalinist purges, the fictional female character, Jamal, commits suicide at the end because she was forced to marry someone she did not love. In contrast, in the novel *New Happiness* (*Yangi Saadat*), by the reformist Uzbek writer Hamza Hakimzada Niyazi (1889–1929), the female and male characters marry in a happy ending after their parents allow their daughter to obtain an education. The Muslim reformist intellectuals (Jadids) believed that the idea of gender equality could be introduced in the Muslim communities of Russia and be gradually achieved through education of both men and women. Abdulla Avloni (1878–1934), a prominent reformist educator and poet, addresses his wife about educating their children of both sexes in one of his poems printed in 1914 three years before the Bolshevik revolution:

*Oh my wife, shouldn't we educate our son?
Shouldn't our daughter become a teacher?
Those uneducated will face dark days
Youth age is like silver and gold. (1998, 14)*

In reformist writer Mahmud Khoja Behbudi's (1875–1919) drama entitled *Patricide or the State of the Uneducated Child*, a modern-minded Central Asian Muslim priest (Khoja) advises a Rich Man (Bay), a conservative and narrow-minded character, on the importance of education in the following conversations between the two:

THE RICH MAN: Oh, priest! Are you interrogating me? Son is mine, wealth is mine, and it is none of your business! Look one of the educated ones is yourself and you don't have a bread to eat. Do you give advice in your present humble condition? Hayrullah, close the guest room, I am sleepy.
(The servant HAYRULLA stands aside after picking up the tray and the tea cups)

MUSLIM PRIEST: In order to be educated and become a priest one needs money. The state of our rich people is like this. Thus, God forbid, we will be disgraced in both this and the other world. Getting education was obligatory for all Muslims both male and female. What happened to this? Ah, pity to our condition! (*staring at the RICH MAN*) Sir, I told you the way of the Islamic Law (*Sheri'at*) and I did what the Islamic law required from me.¹⁶

At the end of the play, the Rich Man, who refuses the advice of the modern-minded priest and another reformist intellectual to educate his son, is murdered during a burglary involving his son and his uneducated friends. A reformist intellectual character, who is named as "Intellectual," reappears at the last scene of the play when the Rich Man's son and his friends are arrested and taken away in police custody:

INTELLECTUAL: Since we are uneducated and also don't educate our children, these kind of bad and unfortunate events will continue among us. There is no other way other than to be educated and to educate others. God Almighty should warn others and give you patience.

The Muslim reformists of Central Asia, who were reluctant to discuss the issue of the unveiling of women openly in the pre-Soviet press when they were under severe attack by the conservative circles of their society, were able to raise this issue in their literary works in the pre-Soviet period. One of the best testaments of this is a poem written against veiling in 1920 by the most prominent reformist Uzbek poet, Abdulhamid Sulayman Cholpan (1897–1938), who was killed during the Stalinist purges. In his poem "For an Uzbek Girl," published in 1922, the poet earnestly expresses his deep sorrows for Uzbek women behind veils:

*I see: in each nation's sky
Their stars gleam brightly.
And each person drinks one's fill
Stars' sprinkled radiant on the earth!*

*There is no garden where there is no female rose,
There is no yard where there is no female nightingale.
There is no place where there is any female scent
There is no heart which is not captivated by a woman . . .*

*In each nation's garden, those roses
 Are the women and girls of that people;
 Each people has its own true path
 That is based on their women's footsteps.*

*In no nation, those beautiful faces
 Of women to be put behind veils.
 In no nation . . . a cruel hand
 Slaps a woman in rage.*

*Wherever I've gone, I've found
 Women with their open faces;
 Alas, my women are veiled in my country
 Oh, Uzbek girl, I mourn in grief,
 I suffocate,
 I die!¹⁷*

This poem, written in August 1920, clearly rejects the Soviet notion that the ideas of both women's emancipation and the unveiling of the Muslim women were introduced first only in the Soviet period. Cholpan's poem reflects precisely the ideals of the reformist intellectuals in Muslim Central Eurasia prior to the Soviet period. The Soviet strategy of the drastic and harsh implementation of the unveiling campaign (the so-called Khujum), however, was not what the Muslim reformists had in mind.

Central Eurasian Politics: Mobilization by and for Women

Against this backdrop of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reformism, the first four congresses of the Muslims of Russia were held in 1905, 1906, and 1914. Unfortunately, no female delegates were in attendance. The large numbers of conservative male delegates in those initial congresses and the weakness of a female reformist movement at that time conspired to block the participation of any female delegate. However, this rejection did not stop women from mobilizing, as women reformists later began to organize as important lobbying groups. Still, when the Crimean Tatars held a meeting for the autonomy of the Crimean region on March 25, 1917, there were only two female delegates among the 2,000 participants. Nevertheless, that meeting endorsed the political rights of women

۱۹۱۷ نچى يىلده ۲۴ نچى آپرىلده
قزاندەغى مسلمەلروكىللىرى اسىيىزىڭ «روسىيە
مىسلمەلرى اوچون مەركىزى مۇسسە»
طوغروسىندەغى داقلاد تىكشۈرۈ اوچون
صايلانغان كامىسىيە بو طوغرىدەغى داقلادلارنى
اوقوب توبىندەگى قارارغە كىلدى.

- (۱) روسىيە مىسلمەلرى نىڭ بتون آرغانىزاتسىيەلىرى بىرلەشەرگە
تېوش بونىڭ اوچون مەلى كامىتت لارنى رايونى كامىتت لارغە
رايونىلارنى بىر سىنترالنى كامىتتە باغلاو تېوش.
- (۲) مەركىزى كامىتت حاضىرگە وقتلىچەغەنە بولور.
- (۳) وقتلى مەركىزى كامىتت نىڭ اورتى مەسكەودە بولور.
- (۴) بو كامىتت نىڭ اعضالىرى ۵ دن كىم بولماس.
- (۵) كامىتت نىڭ مادى ياغن تامەن ايتەرلىك آقچە خلقدن
توبەندەگى رەوشچە جىولور.
- روسىيەدەگى مىسلمەلر جمعيت خىرىيەلىرى اوچەرىوز سوم
بىرورلر. ايرلر جمعيت خىرىيەلىرى اوزلرى تەلەگانچە باردەم
ايتەرلر. هم وكىلەر اويلرىنە قايتقاچ تورلى يوللر بىلەن
آقچە جىبارلر.
- (۶) مەركىزى كامىتت نىڭ مقصدىنە خدمت ايتەر اوچون
كامىتت طرفىدىن بىر ژورنال چىقارلور.

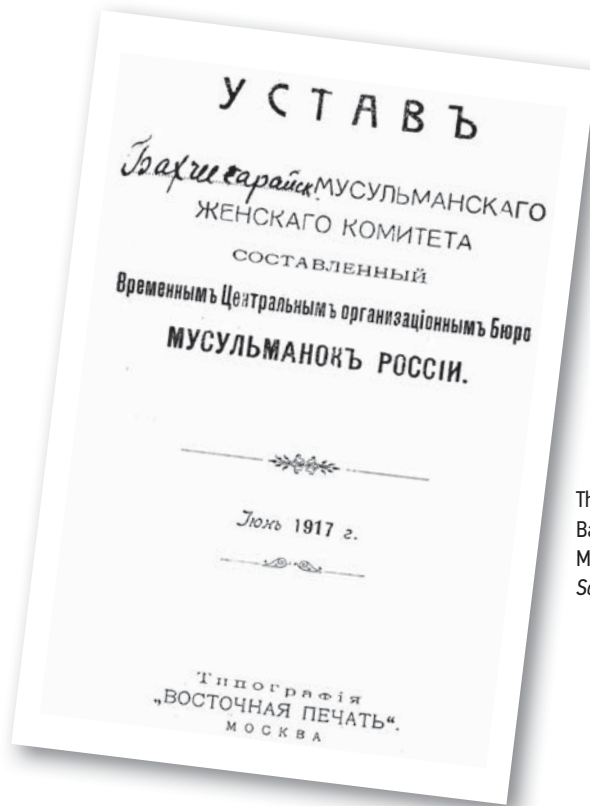
One of the resolutions adopted at the
First Congress of Muslim-Turkic Women
in Kazan city on April 24–27, 1917.
Source: Hablemitoglu 1998: 468.

مىسلمەلر اسىيىزى

خاتونلارنىڭ اجتماعى وسىياسى حقوقلار
حقىندە توبەندەگى قارارنى چىقاردى:

- (۱) قزىلنى اورتا هم عالى مەكتىبلەردە اوقىلسون.
- (۲) ياشلىرى اوزغان خاتونلر اوچون تورلى قورصلار
آچلسون.
- (۳) خاتونلارنىڭ حقوقلارن حمايه جمعيتلىرى آچلسون.
- (۴) خاتونلارنىڭ طورمىشنى مادى ومعنوى جەتدىن ياخشىرتو
جمعيتلىرى آچلسون.
- (۵) مەرىجىدە مىسلمانلر اوچون شفا خانە هم ولادت خانەلر
آچلسون.
- (۶) فاحش خانەلر هم فحش توغروسىندە زاقونلر بىتراسون.
- (۷) مىسلمان خاتونلارنى بتون سىياسى حقوقلاردا ايرلر بولن
بىر بولسولر.

Another resolution adopted at the First
Congress of Muslim-Turkic Women in
Kazan city on April 24–27, 1917. Source:
Hablemitoglu 1998: 469.



The Rules and Guidelines of the Bakhchesaray Committee for Muslim Women (June 1917).
 Source: Hablemitoglu 1998: 498.

along with supporting cultural and political autonomy for the Crimean Tatars. The conservative male delegates, however, dispersed a small group of Azerbaijani women when they tried to participate at the First Congress of Caucasia on April 15–20, 1917, in Baku. Women's participation was also prevented at several other congresses in April 1917, such as the First Muslim Congress of the Ufa Region, the Turkistan Muslim Congress in Tashkent, the First Kazak Congress in Orenburg, and the First Congress of Northern Caucasia (Hablemitoglu 2004; Kocaoglu 2001).

Despite these negative developments, women continued their activities in support of gender equality. Women reformists succeeded in organizing the First Congress of Muslim-Turkic Women in Kazan city on April 24–27, 1917, at which more than 400 Muslim (largely Turkic) women from various regions of Tsarist Russia participated. This congress proved to be the most successful political step that the Muslim women in Central Eurasia had taken, because several important resolutions for woman's rights were endorsed by it. One of the first resolutions the congress adopted was related to the establishment of a Central Committee of Muslim Women of Russia as an umbrella organization to coordinate the activities of various women's groups and organizations. The resolution asserted:

1. All the organizations of the Muslim Turkic women in Russia need to be united; therefore, all local and regional committees should be united under a Central Committee;
2. The Central Committee at present will be temporary;
3. The headquarters of the Central Committee will be in Moscow;
4. The Central Committee will be composed of at least five members;
5. Financial aid for the Central Committee will come from following revenues: the charity organizations of the Muslim Women of Russia, the charity organizations of the Muslim Men of Russia; and the delegates of this congress.
6. The Central Committee will issue a journal for advocating its goals. (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 466, 468)¹⁸

Besides the establishment of this Central Committee, the Congress in Kazan also approved a resolution on the social and political rights of Muslim women of Russia, the key provisions of which were:

1. Girls should be educated at the middle and higher schools;
2. Special courses should be opened for the aged women;
3. An association for defending the rights of women should be founded;
4. Various societies should be established for improving the material and spiritual life of women;
5. Hospitals and maternity clinics for Muslim women should be opened everywhere;
7. New laws should be implemented for the brothel houses and prostitution;
8. Muslim women should be equal to men in all political rights. (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 466, 469)

The Muslim female delegates also endorsed a very interesting resolution, "Women's Rights in Islam," which examined the rights of women according to the Qur'an. This bold initiative asserted:

1. According to the Qur'anic Law (Shariat), men and women are equal;
2. The participation of women in political and social activities is appropriate and justified by the Qur'anic Law (Shariat);
3. Covering the face of women with a "*hijab*" (veil) outside has no place in the Qur'anic Law (Shariat). (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 466-467, 470)

Following the success of the Kazan congress, the prime time arrived for the Muslim women of Central Eurasia to participate at the next major event, the Congress of the Muslims of Russia. In the First Congress of Russia's Muslims on May 1, 1917, there were 112 female delegates out of 970 total delegates (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 163). This shows that the number of the women activists between 1905 and 1917 was rapidly increasing, and their activities were becoming more effective. Another big surprise awaiting the male delegates at the congress was that they met with a new type of woman who was not shy to sit side by side with the men and not content to remain silent anymore; these women were ready to fight for their rights (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 163). Women participants succeeded in electing their female candidate, Selime Yaqubova, chairperson of the Central Office of Muslim Women, to the twelve-seat Presidency Council of the Congress. Thanks to the lobbying efforts of the women, a separate "Women's Issue" was included on the agenda, and a special "Women's Question Section" was established in order to prepare a report on this issue. One of the most heated debates between several female delegates and their conservative male counterparts at the congress was on the issue of the polygamy habits of Muslim men. The women speakers expressed strong objections against those who defended the polygamy rights of the men. According to Shefika Khanim, the following twelve-point "Women Action Plan" was endorsed with a majority vote, after long debate, which continued until midnight on May 1 (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 165-66):

1. For the sake of the nation's future, it is important that the women benefit from all political rights. Women will have rights to elect and be elected.
2. Necessary precautions should be taken in case some men will prevent their wives and daughters from going to the election polls.
3. It became a common habit to claim the right of men to have up to four wives according to the Qur'an. Since it is impossible to behave justly and equally to all four wives at the same time, acquiring more than one wife becomes void.
4. Up to the present day, women couldn't become the responsible elder of their children. Since women have been trapped like slaves between the four walls of their own homes, family life is in a state inappropriate to humanity.
5. The youngsters are being forced into marriage without their consent.
6. For the nation's survival, healthy generations are needed. Fathers need to be free from contagious diseases.

7. There are men who divorce their wives and marry another woman. These kinds of events lead to the destruction of families and make innocent women unhappy.
8. When husband and wife can't get along well, a woman can't get a divorce if the man doesn't want one. Usually children get hurt when there is no harmony in a family.
9. Since girls are being married at very young ages in Turkistan, among the Kazakhs, and in the Caucasus, young women turn into exhausted creatures by early aging and sickness.
10. When a girl is married among the Kazakhs, the bride's father receives "*qalm*" bride-wealth (money, property, or animal). Taking bride-wealth is nothing more than the selling of a girl.
11. Women have fallen into brothel houses for various reasons. Women should be saved from this shameful act for the sake of the nation and all humanity.
12. Women should be equal with men in all political and social rights.

When these reformist-minded Muslim intellectuals seized chances to create either independent republics in Bukhara and Kharazm or autonomous governments in Bolshevik Russia, one of their first reforms was to give equal political rights to women along with men. Turkish scholars in Turkey often are very proud of the fact that Turkish women received the right to vote and also be elected in the constitution in 1934, first among all Islamic countries and ahead of some Western European countries as well. The early constitutions of the Muslim Turkic peoples in Central Eurasia prior to the Soviet takeover, however, contest this myth. The first legislation in the entire Islamic world that granted women the right to vote and run for office was the constitution of the Crimean Tatar Autonomous Government in 1917. Article 18 of the constitution states the rights of women: "The Congress, having acknowledged the equality of humanity, approves that the women have the same equal rights with men and it orders the parliament to prepare a new law based on this equality."¹⁹ The second legal move among the Turkic peoples in Russia was taken by the Tatars of Russia. The 1918 constitution of the All-Russian and Siberian Turk-Tatar Autonomous Government stated in Article 20: "Any male or female person 20 years old has the right to elect or be elected to the Parliament." This trend of giving women equal rights in politics was carried on in the constitutions of the independent republics of Bukhara and Kharazm in 1921. The Bukharan constitution recognized the equality of women in politics: "Article 57: Each citizen of the Bukharan

People's Counciliar Republic who is 20 years old on the election day enjoys the right of electing a parliament member or be elected as a parliament member regardless of being a male or female.”

Besides granting women the right to vote and to be elected, these early pre-Soviet constitutions of the Turkic peoples of Crimea (1917), Volga-Ural region (1918), Bukhara (1921), and Kharazm (1921) also endorsed the rights of both women and men to own private property. In this respect, the constitutions of Muslim Central Eurasia between 1917 and 1921 differ from the first Soviet constitution of 1918 and subsequent versions in that the Soviet constitutions deny the right of private property and bequeathing of the land and property from parents to children.

Despite the fact that the constitutions of the autonomous governments of the Crimean Tatars in Crimea (1917), All-Russian Tatar-Muslims in Ufa (Volga-Ural region) (1918), Alash-Orda in the territory of the present-day Kazakhstan (1917), Turkistan in the city of Kokand (1917), and the independent republics Bukhara (1920) and Kharazm (1920) contained articles promoting gender equality, full implementation of these political rights for women was never achieved because the Soviet army eliminated these autonomous governments and republics one by one between 1918 and 1923. The demise of these regimes, however, does not negate the fact that some Muslim Central Eurasian men and women did struggle to promote gender equality and that their efforts bore some fruit in the short-lived republics of the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

Substantial achievements in the field of women's emancipation as well as equal political rights for women in Muslim Central Eurasia were mainly realized in the Soviet era. The struggle for gender rights by various women activists side by side with their male colleagues in the pre-Soviet-period Central Eurasia, however, should not be overlooked. Despite their small numbers and the unfavorable conditions, representatives of Muslim women bravely participated in the movement to enlighten the Muslims of Central Eurasia and acquire political and social rights for Muslim women before the firm establishment of Soviet rule in Central Eurasia. And their efforts bore some results in the constitutions and legislation of the autonomous Muslim Central Eurasian governments and republics between 1917 and 1923. However, with the onset of Soviet rule, these short-lived regimes were unable to implement gender reforms. This situation

then allowed the Soviet regime to minimize the significance of the indigenous Central Eurasian efforts at gender reform and to promulgate its master narrative of Muslim Eurasian gender subordination and Soviet women's liberation.

Because the Soviet regime sought to conceal the positive and progressive ideas and accomplishments of the pre-Soviet Central Eurasia on many issues, including the gender question, new generations of Soviet Muslims could only remember and appreciate the Soviet achievements that were implemented. However, many times these were enacted through drastic and harsh measures that caused the loss of thousands of lives, such as during the mass campaigns of collectivization (1928–1933), the forced unveiling of Muslim women (1927–1930), and the Stalinist purges of politicians, intellectuals, and writers (1934–1938).²⁰ When the prominent Uzbek writer and poet Abdulhamid Sulayman Cholpan was pressured by the Soviet authorities to write poems in praise of these Soviet achievements, he wrote the following poem, entitled "New Me" ("Yangi Men" in Uzbek), in August 1934:

*I now have no grief,
I'm joyous like the springs,
To the death of the nights
I'm the one who burst into laughter!*

*I don't have the habit of longing
Secrets from the dead souled nights,
I don't want melancholy!
You put your chains on the Majnun!²¹*

*In my new country
There is neither Majnun nor chain!
Here, each one who works
His happiness comes to his arms!*

*Here labor is the monarch
It gives orders, doesn't let you to tire:
Because the musician doesn't lose
His affection to his own instrument.*

*Here the labor creates
Miracles with enthusiasm.*

*Here every day the dawn breaks
With lively songs and melodies.*

*As one of the millions [of people]
I sweat too each day;
Each day new excitements,
I get use to the victories!*

*As one of the millions [of people]
I'm also lively, I'm also joyous
To the death of the past
I'm the one who burst into laughter!*

In this poem, Cholpan describes the so-called Soviet achievements by employing both dramatic irony and metaphor. All the adornments in the poem create a discrepancy between what the character in the poem believes or says and what is really happening in the Soviet Union. The main metaphor behind the depiction of the speaker of himself as a “new me” also reinforces the intensive usage of figurative speech in the poem. The speaker in the poem is a “New Me” because he is stripped of all human feelings such as longing, passion, melancholic love, grief, and exhaustion. His contentment and pleasure now simply derive from labor and work: “Here, each one who works/His happiness comes to his arms!” Joy and happiness are not something that one has to strive for; they are automatically delivered by labor, which is portrayed as the single ruler in this new realm: “Here labor is the monarch/It gives orders, doesn’t let you to tire.” As a result, the speaker of the poem has lost his individuality like millions of other people “in my new country” (the Soviet Union). Now he has become indifferent to his spiritual or national past: “To the death of the nights/I’m the one who burst into laughter!” Poet Cholpan’s exposé of this “New Me,” or actually the “New Soviet Man,” only increased official criticism and pressures on him during the Stalinist purges. On July 14, 1937, he was taken to prison and executed by a rifle squad on October 4, 1938; his court verdict was issued a day later.²²

Cholpan, of course, was just one of the numerous pre-Soviet Muslim enlighteners (Jadids) whose many progressive ideas on reforming Muslim communities were later taken over by the Soviet authorities. Although many Jadid intellectuals and politicians had to collaborate with the Soviet authorities in the execution of these reforms, they were eliminated one by one between the late 1920s and late 1930s. There is, though, a fundamental difference between

the reforms that were envisaged by the pre-Soviet Muslim reformists and the way the Soviet authorities have implemented them on the Muslims by force. The pre-Soviet Muslim reformists, on the one hand, intended to introduce these reforms, especially the ones regarding gender equality and the unveiling of Muslim women, through education. They believed that they could achieve the emancipation of women only by educating the new generations of boys and girls in schools and cultivating the older generations through press and other tools of modernization. The Soviets, on the other hand, presented the emancipation of women as a class struggle on an ideological level while using it as an effective instrument to increase the labor force in the Soviet Union. In contrast, the pre-Soviet Muslim reformists treated gender equality as just another significant step in the creation of a modern society for their Muslim communities. They foresaw gender equality as one of the inseparable components of modernization, together with modern education, press freedom, private property, and freedom of consciousness—in short, many of the rights and values that were denied in the Soviet Union.

Knowledge and awareness of the reformist (Jadidist) heritage by the post-Soviet Muslims of both the Russian Federation and the republics of Azerbaijan and Central Asia are crucial for the present transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The pre-Soviet Muslim (Turkic) reformists in Central Eurasia took bold steps toward the implementation of women's emancipation and the social and political rights of women at least two decades before the Soviet period. Although influenced by political reforms and developments in Russia (1905) and the Ottoman Empire (1839, 1876, and 1908), they were not under the direction or influence of tsarist Russian administrators or the Russian elite; they acted out of their own interests and experiences. Recognition of their activism not only challenges Soviet mythology about the lack of modernization within the Muslim communities during the pre-Soviet era but also provides a more comprehensive background to the Moscow-engineered gender politics of the later years. Well-educated pre-Soviet women, although few in number, voluntarily took up key roles together with the men in the reformist movement that sought to enlighten the Muslim Turkic peoples of Tsarist Russia starting from the mid-nineteenth century until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and then until 1920. Their efforts demonstrate that Muslim peoples in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia today are capable of tackling the new challenges they encounter to create an equal and freer society for both genders.

NOTES

1. The terms “Central Eurasia” and “Muslim Central Eurasia” in this study refer to a larger area comprising present-day Azerbaijan and the five republics of Central Asia along with the Volga-Ural region in the Russian Federation inhabited by Muslim Turkic peoples, and Crimea in the Ukraine (all these areas were part of Tsarist Russia before 1917). Although the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China is also inhabited by Muslim Turkic peoples, this region is left outside the scope of this chapter since it has never been under Russian and Soviet rule. In contrast to “Central Eurasia,” the term “Central Asia” includes only the former Soviet republics and the present-day independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
2. Lenin 1984, 86.
3. Nadezhda K. Krupskaya’s “Preface,” written on November 30, 1933, in Lenin 1984, 9. The author thanks Terri Miller, Slavic bibliographer of the Michigan State University Library, for helping to identify several sources on Lenin; also see Yelena Yemelyanova 1985 and Yedlin 1980.
4. The term “pre-Soviet period” designates the transitional period from the rule of Tsarist Russia until the establishment of Soviet power in early 1920s. For the Muslim Turkic peoples, this transitional period starts from the late nineteenth century, when several reformist leaders initiated a modernization drive in the press, new system schools, and political activities.
5. The first playwright in Azerbaijan was Mirza Fathali Akhundov (1818–1878), who wrote six comedies between 1850 and 1855 in Turki (Turkic) language. Between the 1850s and the 1910s, many plays were written and staged in Baku (Azerbaijan), Simferopol (Crimea), and Kazan (Volga-Ural region). The first Central Asian play, *Padarkush* (Patricide), was written in 1911, published in 1913, and staged in 1914. See Allworth 1964a, 1964b, esp. 214–235.
6. See also Popova 1949.
7. For other works related to this subject see Komatsu and Dudoignon 2003. For the Reformist press, see Usmanova 1996 and 1998.
8. I learned some of the details of Rana’s life through interviewing her husband, Raci; see Kocaoglu 1987.
9. Shefika Gaspirinskaya (“Gaspirali” in Turkish) left Crimea for Azerbaijan with her husband, Nasip Yusufbeyli, an Azerbaijani politician, after the closing of her father’s newspaper *Terjuman* on February 10, 1918, during the invasion of Crimea by the Red Army. When her husband was killed by the invading Red Army in Baku in early May 1920, Shefika also could not stay any longer in Azerbaijan, and with the help

of Turkish diplomats who provided her and her children Ottoman passports, Shefika was able to go to Istanbul and spend the rest of her life in Turkey until her death on August 31, 1975, in Ankara (Hablemitoglu and Hablemitoglu 1998, 274–290).

10. After the death of Ismail Gaspirinski in 1914, his son became the editor in chief of the paper.
11. For a list of periodicals in Muslim Central Eurasia, see Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1964.
12. The main source for the Jadid activities in Bukhara is the work written in Uzbek by the prominent Bukharan reformist intellectual Sadriddin Ayni (1878–1954), who later became the cultural godfather of Tajikistan during the Soviet period: “Bukhara Inqilabi Tarixi Uchun Materiallar” (“Materials for the history of Bukharan revolution”), composed first in 1922 and later published in the first volume of multivolume works of Ayni. See Ayni 1963.
13. The original name of the organization is Bukhara Ta’imim-Ma’arif Jemiyet-i Hayriyyesi. The text and its English translation, along with the facsimile of the original source, are given in Kocaoglu 2001, 36, 469–483.
14. Osman Khoja served as the president of the Bukhara People’s Conciliar Republic from September 23, 1921, to April 10, 1922, when he left Bukhara for Afghanistan. In a recent academic work, it is incorrectly stated that “Faizulla Xo’jaev . . . was the president of the Bukharan People’s Republic (BPR)” (Kamp 2006, 64). The same source also states that Faizulla Xo’jaev “at age twenty-four, became president” of the republic in 1920. Actually, Faizulla Xo’jaev was the prime minister of the republic; see Kocaoglu 1973, 156.
15. The other Bukharan students who stayed on in Germany and Turkey served in universities and other institutions there, leading long and productive lives. A Uzbek scholar published a very valuable book about the lives of students who once were sent to Berlin from Tashkent and the Bukharan Republic. See Turdiyev 1991.
16. For the English translation of the play, see Allworth 1986.
17. This poem was published in Cholpin 1922, 58–60. It is also mentioned in the Allworth 1990, 186, but without giving the text, translation, or the main content of the poem.
18. For this and other resolutions, see the attached facsimile of the original documents in Arabic script.
19. The printed texts of all the constitutions in original Turkic languages and Russian are in the personal archives of the author.
20. The forceful Soviet campaigns and the death of thousands of people as a result were detailed in Massell 1974; Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006.
21. Majnun is the name of the young man who is madly in love with his darling “Layla”

(or “Leila/Leyla”) in the most popular classical Middle Eastern love story (Layla and Majnun) in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literatures. When Layla was married to another person by her father’s will, Majnun loses his conscious and retreats to a desert composing songs for his love.

22. Murtaza Qarsiboev, “Cholpanning jinoiy ishi,” *San’at*, no. 8 (1990): 8–11, cited in Kara 2002, 140 n.8.

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