

**"GUARDIANS OF THE NATION":  
WOMEN, ISLAM AND THE SOVIET LEGACY  
OF MODERNIZATION IN AZERBAIJAN**

*Nayereh TOHIDI*

*(California State University, Northridge, USA)*

A glamorous picture of a blonde, smiling Turkish beauty was plastered on the walls of many stores, offices, and homes that I visited [in 1991-1992 in what was then Soviet Azerbaijan. Together with other byproducts of glasnost and perestroika in those last days of the Soviet Union were certain Western images openly promoted in almost all republics, particularly Russia, that were in sharp contrast to socialist ideals. In the context of Azerbaijan, however, this particular new image - a beauty queen from Turkey - conveyed not only certain gender-related messages but also important political statements concerning the growing ethnic and nationalist orientation of society.

Yet in less than four years, another new image entered into the fluid popular culture of the country, in sharp contrast to both the secular pro-Russian and pro-Soviet ideals of the past and the secular, nationalist pro-Turkish and pro-Western orientation of contemporary Azerbaijan. This most recent image, at times co-opting the Turkish beauty queen, portrays a demure young girl veiled in a white scarf, timidly looking down at a set of prayer beads she holds. The picture is accompanied by an arresting caption: a hadith concerning the virtues of prayer. Like the earlier one, this new image is loaded with messages regarding gender roles and the evolving identity of Azerbaijan. Although the previous image reflects the post-Soviet, postcommunist culture of display, emphasizing physical beauty, Western fashion, consumerism, and Turkish identity, the new one signals modesty, morality, Islamic values, and Muslim identity.

The popularity of such contradictory images is suggestive of, first, the complexity, diversity, and fluidity of national cultural identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and, second, a thesis that here, as in many colonial and postcolonial contexts, gender issues are intertwined with

variables like race, nationality, ethnicity, class, and religion. Through a demonstration of the interplay between such variables, I seek to explain in this article the

present dual nature of women's status in Azerbaijan. The specific questions to be addressed include the following:

Despite two centuries of Russian influence in Azerbaijan (both under czarist orthodoxy and Soviet state socialism) and the Soviet legacy of equal rights by law, universal literacy, and high educational attainment and high level of employment among women, why is it that gender-related cultural patterns seem to have remained so similar to the ones in Muslim traditional communities? Is this simply due to Islam or Islamic traditionalism, as some Soviet scholars<sup>1</sup> have suggested?

To what degree do the present gender issues and problems in Azerbaijan have their roots in the paradoxical impact of the Soviet model of socialist development and modernization?

What has been the role of nationalism and interethnic conflicts in shaping gender roles under Soviet and post-Soviet contexts?

How are the post-Soviet restructuring policies of the new nationalist state within a market economy affecting women's lives? What is the role of Islam in this new context?

While briefly reviewing three distinct periods in the modern history of Azerbaijan - pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet - I analyze how Russian and Soviet officials, indigenous male elites, and Azeri women all attempted and attempt to manipulate gender issues for their own interests. During each period, gender roles have been constructed, contested, and modified in interaction with local customs, Islamic beliefs, state ideology and policies concerning socioeconomic development, and quasi-colonial, interethnic dynamics.

Azerbaijan provides an especially cogent case for revisiting certain theoretical problems concerning the study of Muslim women. One pertains to the nature, significance, and extent of the role of Islam in determining gender relations and women's status in a Muslim society. Azerbaijan, too, offers yet another example of the diversity of women's situation in the Muslim world, which defies commonly held

Western stereotypes. It demonstrates, for instance, the fallacy of both culturalism, specifically Islamic determinism (i.e., an essentialist approach to Islam still popular among some orientalists), as well as the economic reductionism underlying gender ideology among many Marxist-Leninists and some advocates of developmentalism.

### **I. The Geopolitical Context**

As a Muslim people of the Caucasus, the mostly Shi'i Azeri Turks, who make up 83 percent of the diverse population of Azerbaijan, have been divided for the past two centuries between Iran, having about twenty million Azeris, and the Russian empire and its successor, the Soviet Union. With the exploitation of the Baku oilfields and consequent modernization, Azeri intellectuals were influenced by nation-state formations in Europe and revolutionary movements in Russia, Iran, and Turkey in the early twentieth century. Thus with the collapse of czarist Russia, the first independent People's Republic of Azerbaijan emerged in 1918. In 1920, however, the Bolsheviks, supported by the Russian Red Army, conquered it, eventually replacing it with the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan as one of the fifteen republics of the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

Seventy years later, the parliament of Azerbaijan was among the first to adopt a resolution of independence during the disintegration of the Soviet Union. With that declaration of August 30, 1991, Azeris found themselves in a position resembling their first republic of 1918-1920, facing many serious challenges. Situated in a most sensitive geopolitical region with abundant oil wealth, having ethnic and historic ties with Turkey, Iran, and Russia, Azerbaijan is likely to play an increasingly important role in the orientation of identity politics within the greater Middle East.

Already its post independence position is seriously complicated by the armed conflict with Christian Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabagh. With some 20 percent of its territory under occupation, one of every seven Azerbaijanis has become a refugee or been internally displaced, of which 55 percent are women

and children.<sup>3</sup> This war have devastated the economy and morale of both nations. It is in such an interethnic, war-stricken, and nationally and internally contested milieu that women and men in Azerbaijan are going through a semidecolonization process as they seek to reassess, reimagine, and redefine their identities.

This is, inevitably, a gendered process. Gender-related images and issues, especially women's place in this transitional society, are part of the ideological terrain upon which questions of national identity, ethnic loyalty, Islamic revival, and cultural authenticity are being debated.

## **II. The Historical Background**

Women's status and roles have undergone significant changes through three different eras. By the turn of the twentieth century a limited level of oil-related industrialization had taken place, but it was mainly during the Soviet era that Azerbaijan developed into a modern agricultural and industrial society. The pre-Soviet socialization of Azeri women, too, was very limited and followed a slow pace.

### **The Later Czars**

The political and social roles of Azerbaijani women outside the home date back to the years before the Bolshevik revolution. Women started to enter the public sphere through wage labor in the oil industry, garment workshops, charity activities, women's publications, women's clubs, and broad political groups that promoted women's literacy, vocational training, legal rights, and improvement in their overall status.

In the modern urban life of Azerbaijan around the turn of the century, Azeri women, like their counterparts in Turkey, Iran, and Egypt, had already become a "question." The growing oil industry and Russian-European influence, especially in Baku, had further contributed to debate over the "woman question" and the socialization of women. As elsewhere, tension between the old way of life, traditional views, and modernity manifested itself more clearly in

women's role and gender relations. Most reformers, including secular nationalists, social democrats, and Muslim modernists (Jadidists), saw the emancipation of women as a prerequisite for the revival of Muslim civilization and Azerbaijan's economic, social, and cultural development.<sup>4</sup> People in intellectual circles and the new press, particularly writers like Mirza-Jalil Mammed-Qulizadeh (1866-1932) and his wife, Hamideh Javanshir (1873-1955), raised women's issues in their popular and influential journal *Molla Nasreddin* (1906-1930)<sup>5</sup> Through powerful satire and cartoons, the journal played a crucial role in criticizing the establishment, corrupt officials, and religious conservatives as well as denouncing compulsory veiling and seclusion, polygyny, wife battering, violence, and other oppressive practices against women.<sup>6</sup>

Founded by an Azeri woman (Khadija Alibeyova, 1884-1961) and her husband, the first journal for and by women in Azeri Turkic was published in Baku in 1911. This journal, *Ishiq* (Light), aimed at enlightening women regarding their rights to education and employment by emphasizing certain egalitarian passages from the Qur'an and hadith and by cautiously and indirectly criticizing conservative Islamic authorities. Nevertheless, the journal lasted only a year because of pressures from conservative clerics and lack of financial support.

Along with intellectuals, the new industrial bourgeoisie of Azerbaijan played an important role in the modernization of Azeri society. The first school for Muslim girls, for example, was founded in 1905 by Haji Zeynolabedin Tagiyev, an Azeri oil millionaire and philanthropist. Reformers like Tagiyev remarked on women's education among European women and Muslims of the Volga Tatars while postulating an egalitarian and progressive interpretation of the Qur'an<sup>7</sup>

However, Russian colonizers, as in many other colonial contexts, were unconcerned about real emancipation of women and improvement in women's status. For instance, the Taghiyev school, the only existing school for non-Russian Muslim girls, was overcrowded and expensive. Azeris had to petition the city council of

Nayereh TOHIDI

the czarist regime in Baku for money to begin a pedagogical course for Muslim girls at the school for Russian girls. Azeri representatives on the city council, one of whom made a rousing "down with the veil" speech on the need for education to make women good citizens and good mothers (the two roles being inseparable to him), had to fight vigorously for allocation of funds necessary to start another girls' school for Azeris.<sup>8</sup>

While Azeri bourgeois men and their wives contributed to the reform, modernization; and nation building of Azerbaijan, several women and men from the working class mobilized women for a more revolutionary agenda. As the social-democratic and Marxist movements grew throughout the Russian empire, Azerbaijani workers in the oil industry organized around a group entitled Himmat (Endeavor). Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women from the Tagiyev textile factory and other industries played a leading role in forming a women's wing of Himmat.<sup>9</sup> As early as 1904-1905 they raised specific demands for "maternity leave for women, time on the job for nursing unweaned children, and medical care for all workers."<sup>10</sup>

Azerbaijani female and male intellectuals today take pride in their short-lived independent republic of 1918- 1920, formed upon the collapse of the Russian empire, characterizing it as "the first democratic republic in the entire Muslim world that provided universal suffrage guaranteeing all citizens full civil and political rights regardless of their nationality, religion, social position and sex."<sup>11</sup>

Its brief yet inspiring existence also gave impetus to Azeri nationalism.

In short, this period in the cultural history of Azerbaijan is distinguished by the emergence of a sense of national identity, modernist and reformist Islamic and secular elites, elementary discourses on the "woman question," and a range of activities in support of women's emancipation.

### **The Soviet Era**

The role of women during the seventy years of the Soviet era in

Azerbaijan was characterized in several different ways as state policy and gender strategy changed from strict Marxist egalitarian ideological commitment and vigorous campaigning for women's rights to a later pragmatism centered on economic productivity.

An economic perspective assumed that women's emancipation would automatically follow their participation in social and productive labor in the formal economy. Their massive entrance into the labor force was therefore encouraged. Universal access to education and gainful employment together with the establishment of equal rights in social and political domains - especially egalitarian changes in family law - did contribute to a rise in the overall status of women in both public and private spheres. Nevertheless, in reality women remained subordinated to men, unable to break away from dependence on male kin.

With no or little regard for the environment and sustainable human development, the Soviet state pursued, especially under Joseph Stalin, a strategy of modernization based on heavy and military industrial growth. This strategy called on women to mobilize and take an active part in social production. But in the sphere of reproduction and housework, the need for high quality child care, labor-saving household appliances, food cycle technology, and daily consumer goods, for example, did not constitute priorities for the state.

Other than egalitarian reforms of personal status law, the state paid only lip service to fundamental changes in gender ideology, the patriarchal structure of the family, and the gender-based division of labor in domestic and reproductive domains. The result was the notorious "double burden," a chronic stress on Soviet women's emotional and physical well-being so poignantly reflected in the words of "Kitchen Lines" by Nigar Rafibeyli (1913-1981), a prominent Azeri poet:

I feel so heartsore;  
in this kitchen world;  
After all,  
There is something of a poet in me...

Some are destined to occupy high posts,  
 Others to wash dishes in the kitchen....  
 But who is there to see  
 That the cook burning by the stove  
 Doesn't turn to cinders?<sup>12</sup>

Education is one area in which the state socialism of the USSR deserves undeniable credit. In contrast to women in many Muslim societies elsewhere, Azerbaijani women became universally literate. As of the late 1980s, over 42 percent of tertiary-level students were women, but they have been less numerous in educational fields relevant to better-paid and higher-level employment. Although women constitute over 65 percent of primary and secondary educators, for example, only 22 percent of school administrators are women. According to the official statistics, the health of Soviet Azerbaijani women used to be better than that of its neighbors, Turkey and Iran, far superior to many other Muslim states. Female life expectancy in 1989, for instance, was 74.2 years, compared to 69.4 in Turkey and 67.1 in Iran. Their fertility rate was lower at 2.7 children per woman (Turkey's was 3.6 and Iran's 6.1), and the maternal mortality rate of 29 per 100,000 live births compares well to Turkey's 200 and Iran's 250. The reality of women's health, however, given the unreliability of Soviet statistics, was less encouraging. In Azerbaijan, as throughout the Soviet Union, the state's pro-natal policy, the lack of family planning, and the minimal access to contraceptives rendered abortion the primary means of birth control. The prevalence of abortion, usually carried out under morbid conditions, and particularly the frequency of induced and incomplete operations, was and remains a major gender issue neglected by Soviet and post-Soviet leaders alike.<sup>13</sup>

Compared to most other Muslim societies, the massive integration of women into the formal economy of Azerbaijan has been identified as another success story of Soviet state socialism. Yet a female participation rate of 44 percent reveals a different story when subjected to gendersensitive evaluation. Their heaviest participation



remained in agriculture and manual farm labor (52 percent in 1989 and 49 percent in 1993). On collective farms, moreover, women's labor was concentrated in nonmechanized areas since less than 10 percent were appropriately skilled. Only 1.3 percent held managerial or administrative positions. The overwhelming portion of hard manual labor in livestock, cotton, tea, tobacco, and vegetable farming was relegated to women.

Urban industrial women workers, 45 percent of the total, were also concentrated in the lower paid, lower rank, and lower skill grades. According to the laws of the Soviet state, no male-female wage differentials should have existed, but as a consequence of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation by sex, women's average earnings throughout the USSR have been estimated as about 30 percent lower than those of males.<sup>14</sup>

In the realm of Azerbaijani politics, this familiar pattern obtained. Based on the quota system, a proportional presence of women at local, regional, and national levels of formal politics was maintained in all three branches of government. In 1989, 39 percent of deputies in the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan were women, and until 1991 the parliament's speaker was a woman, yet their mere representation in the **Soviets** failed to translate into women's empowerment. Not only were women and male deputies usually selected by the real source of power, the ruling Communist Party (CP), but women deputies held much less prominent positions than male deputies, suffered a higher **rate** of turnover, and were less likely to be party members.<sup>15</sup> In sum, after over seventy years of the ostensibly egalitarian Soviet regime, the gender hierarchy, cultural ideals, gender-related ethos, and behavioral traits usually attached to Azerbaijani women seem to have remained similar to the ones in Muslim traditional communities elsewhere.

### **The Post-Soviet Era**

Encouraged by the promising reforms (glasnost and perestroika) of the late 1980s, many Azerbaijani women joined the movement for democracy and independence. Through their participation in the

flourishing free press, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), new entrepreneurial opportunities, proliferating political parties, the war-related resistance, relief efforts, and peace initiatives, women have actively contributed to the post-Soviet developments. So far, however, the adverse effects of transition on men and particularly women have overshadowed people's earlier optimism. The excesses and problems of the Soviet past and the exigencies of the return to capitalism are reinforcing regressive tendencies and strengthening old sexist attitudes. For example, with the advent of glasnost, it became an open secret that despite protective labor legislation, a widespread pattern existed of gender bias favoring men. Many women were experiencing hazardous working conditions, especially in the environmentally devastated areas of Central Asia and in some urban industrial regions of Azerbaijan such as Sumgait and Baku. Even officially conducted surveys of 1991 in Azerbaijan report that only half of employed women have been satisfied with their work.<sup>16</sup>

In their political rhetoric and ideological discourses, both secular nationalist and religious forces throughout post-Soviet republics, including Azerbaijan, blame the bygone Soviet system for what they call super employment and abuse of women, especially in those jobs that are seen as disrespectful of women's "feminine qualities and motherhood as their primary duty." With the onset of marketization, the overemployment of women emerged as a central woman question, and some began to call for women to return to the family and free themselves from the double burden by abandoning the excessive toil in the sphere of production.<sup>17</sup> The respect toward women is thus increasingly correlated with their role as mothers.

According to many Azeris, although women have maintained their "respected" and "protected" position in post-Soviet Azerbaijani culture, its extent and parameters are changing. Following electoral reform and the elimination of the quota system during prestroika in 1989, women's presence in formal politics declined drastically, falling in Azerbaijan to 4.8 percent, then recovering to 6 percent in 1992 and 13 percent in the 1995 election. Any actual change in women's political roles, however, cannot be gauged from such quantitative

## 'GUARDIANS OF THE NATION': WOMEN, ISLAM..

shifts in state-oriented politics. A new civil society is emerging with an increasing number of informal and nongovernmental women's organizations, and women are active at this informal level as well as in formal political organizations. Whether they will have greater opportunities than previously to engage in decisionmaking as free agents is not yet clear.

Once relatively protected by the Soviet state women now face the loss of its support together with an inevitably higher economic pressure as they constitute the majority of the newly unemployed in an ever more insecure and violent social atmosphere. Consequently, the need for male protection within the context of marriage has intensified the familial and kinship networks. So far, the process of marketization and democratization has not only failed to remove the disadvantages for women in the Soviet system; it has actually intensified gender asymmetry. Simultaneously, prior female advantages have been jeopardized because of the disruption of the social safety net, soaring prices, rising unemployment, increasingly open sex discrimination, violence, prostitution, crime, and above all, the economic and moral devastation created by the war.

Such a context may be fertile ground for the revival of extremist ideologies that would declare a divinely or biologically determined patriarchal control over women and a return to strictly gender-based social arrangements as a presumed prerequisite for national and spiritual salvation. But can we attribute all the current gender-related problems in Azerbaijan to the restructuring policies of the post-Soviet nationalist state and market economy ? In the following sections I attempt to show to what degree the present gender issues in Azerbaijan have their roots in the previous development strategy of the Soviet state on the one hand and the ethno -religious factors on the other.

### III. The Paradoxical Impact of the Soviet State

In the Muslim peripheries of the Soviet Union such as Azerbaijan, the duality in women's status - formally equal, really unequal - seems to be accentuated by several interrelated factors. One is the Soviet state ideology and policies that prescribed a "statization" of the "woman question," a state-centered approach assuming that women's emancipation could be achieved through a deliberate top-down strategy of social engineering.

Under such a strategy, implemented largely if not solely by a male elite, the state became the primary actor instead of playing the role of facilitator of women's emancipation. A state-created or state-controlled women's organization declared itself the sole representative of women's concerns, replacing all women's autonomous movements and independent organizations. In practice, this strategy artificially homogenized women's diverse interests, undermined their genuine voice, and confined their real agency.

One may conclude that the more authoritarian the state, the more confined and auxiliary becomes the role of the state-oriented women's apparatus and the wider the gap between formal emancipation and real equality. When the originally desirable goals of women's emancipation (such as, for example, unveiling) are perceived as too closely associated with a repressive state, they eventually lose their credibility and appeal, especially among nationalists. Women, too, may not value or appreciate their controversial state-initiated rights when they themselves have had no role in attaining them. As a result, a backlash like the return to the veil and gender segregation may follow a statist, antisocialist regime such as the Turkey of Atatürk or the Iran of the Pahlavi shahs that desired larger roles for women.<sup>18</sup> Are such paradoxical consequences of Soviet statization likely in the similar post-Soviet Azerbaijani context?

The success or failure of recent regressive trends will be determined, to a great extent, by the nature of women's response and resistance. Unlike what some scholars have implied, Muslim women, in both the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras, were more than mere pawns,

victims of ignorance and male oppression, and more than passive followers of the state and CP.<sup>19</sup> In the case specifically of Tatar and Azerbaijani women having a background in the Jadid or Muslim modernist and social democratic movements, one may argue that some women at times used the Communists' support for equality and the state's legal protection to fight patriarchy and religious reaction while promoting their own agenda. The play *Sevil* by the popular Azerbaijani playwright Ja'far Jabbarli, though fictional, illuminates the small number of women activists in the 1920s who pursued women's rights initially independent of CP influence.<sup>20</sup>

A careful analysis of the Zhenotdel, the Women's Department of the CP both in its Russian and Muslim Azerbaijani contexts, reveals a continuous tension between the women members and the male party leaders. Zhenotdel's brief but stormy existence played a crucial role in the mobilization, socialization, and emancipation of Soviet women in general and Muslim women in particular. It had a mixture of native/local and Russian leadership in each republic. Besides press organs and publications aimed at literate women, local branches in Azerbaijan as elsewhere used sewing circles, conferences, women's clubs, and even public bathhouses for consciousness raising and mobilization of women.

The crucial role that local organs and indigenous mechanisms played in such mobilization attests to the native Azeri women's own enthusiastic involvement. Unlike the party organs dominated by Russian communists, the "women's clubs" were almost exclusively staffed by Azerbaijani women. One such club exemplifying Azeri women's agency in this period was the AH Bayramov Women's Club in Baku, which predated Soviet rule and was radicalized in the early years of the Soviet state. Its press organ, *Sharq Qadini* (Woman of the East), played an important role in the political education and social integration of women in Azerbaijan.<sup>21</sup>

By 1923, many women had discarded their veils. As part of an antiveil campaign, certain activists removed their veils at the city theater during a popular play (like *Sevil*, Jabbarli's play). Yet many others, including some activists of the women's clubs, felt compelled

or chose to retain some form of veil, often wearing, instead of the enveloping *charshab*, a compromise version in the form of a headscarf or *kalagaye*, originally part of an Azeri folk costume.

Nonetheless, the campaign promoting women's rights and opposing their seclusion, illiteracy, and so forth could not escape incidents of patriarchal resistance and even violent reaction from conservative mullahs. The growing association of the campaign with Russians, seen by many as the reincarnations of czarist imperialists in communist guise, further complicated the average Azeri's reaction to unveiling, for example, despite the active role of local women. Although they happened less frequently than in Central Asia, incidents of setting fire to unveiled women did in fact occur.

Reminiscences of ambivalence among many Azeris toward the process of women's emancipation may be detected even today. I noted, for instance, mixed feelings among some Azeri women and especially men toward the prominent statue in a Baku public square, the "Azerbaijan Azad Qadini" (The liberated woman of Azerbaijan), erected in 1950 by a popular Azeri artist. Symbolizing women's freedom from the veil, the huge Soviet-style figure of a woman in a dramatic unveiling gesture signifies for a small number of Azeris, notably the more religio-nationalist ones, the "dishonoring of Azeri Muslims by infidel Russian Communists, a symbol of shame."<sup>1</sup>

Among contemporary male and female elites, including many nationalists, the women pioneers of liberation during the early years of Soviet rule are remembered with mixed feelings. Although they are respected and praised for their contribution to women's enhanced roles and massive integration into the processes of social modernization and economic development, their adherence to or collaboration with the communist system is remarked with resentment.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the party campaign for women's rights or the support given by the communist state to such institutions as the Ali Bayramov Women's Club was for Muslim Azeri women a mixed blessing. Although it accelerated the process of emancipation, it increasingly took away women's genuine voice and spontaneous role in the process. Furthermore, by statization and augmented Russification

therein, it intensified people's resentment, if not actual resistance, to women's liberation.

#### IV. Interethnic and Nationalist Dynamics

Especially in the Muslim republics, the Moscow-centered Communist Party's expectations of Zhenotdel - to be a docile instrument for implementing the party's policies among the female constituency - differed from those of many active women. An early tension grew into serious conflicts as many women members went beyond the party line in their actions and ideas for women's emancipation. This gender-related conflict intersected with interethnic tensions between Russians and Azeris. As Hokima Sultanova, one of the pioneers of the Azeri women's movement, well realized, solving the woman question among non-Russian nationalities of the USSR had become inextricably linked with solving the "nationality question."<sup>25</sup>

The ambivalent policy of Soviet Russians toward diverse nationalities, especially the compromise policy of "nativization" (*korenizatsiia*) proposed by V . I. Lenin, produced paradoxical results: a single state with an internationalist and universalist ideology under which emerged several distinct nation-states with acute nationalist sentiments.<sup>2</sup> This nativization compromise of the 1920s entailed the promotion of native elites, ethnonational culture, and local economies in each republic. In Azerbaijan the postrevolutionary compromise accelerated the process of nation building to a new level of national coherence and consciousness, the seeds of which had been planted during Azerbaijan's ephemeral republic of 1918-1920.<sup>27</sup>

Critical to this process was the role of the native intelligentsia, here the Azeri Muslim national communists, heritors of Jadidism. Muslim national communism was the product of a collusion between Russians and Caucasians, a synthesis of European Marxism, liberalism, Azerbaijani nationalism, and an Islamic outlook.<sup>28</sup> This native elite and Russian Marxist-Leninists concurred in the desire for socioeconomic change, including a modest improvement in the status

of women.

By the early 1930s, however, Russian chauvinism revived under Stalin's personal autocracy. It destroyed Muslim national communism, severely punishing any hint of small-nation nationalism, imprisoning or executing thousands of ethnic communist leaders in the Great Purges, and promoting Russian culture as the most advanced in the USSR. Despite its egalitarian internationalist rhetoric, Soviet-style modernized industrialization, therefore, ultimately established a pattern similar to that in the capitalist imperial world: an "inequitable, hierarchical, imperial relationship between the center and the peripheral peoples,"<sup>29</sup> with Muslims at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Within such a paradoxical context, the Soviet Union ironically intensified popular nationalist passions. And these nationalist passions, I argue, have been of a gendered character and are expressed (if not held) in Azerbaijan with more intensity among women than among their male counterparts. For in retrospect, one can see that the woman question was an area over which the center (the Russian male elite) made a compromise with the periphery (the local male elite in Muslim Azerbaijan). As reflected in the voice of a leading Azeri woman activist of the time, Mina Mirzayeva, the implementation of this nativization was a mixed blessing for Azerbaijani women. It "had meant the promotion of Azeri men to positions of leadership in the Party, the government apparatus, the **Soviets** and even cooperatives . . . rendering calls such as 'women should be given opportunities' absolutely meaningless."<sup>30</sup> The extent of this nativization compromise in gender issues was fairly limited under Lenin, partly because of the active interference of Russian and Azeri women revolutionaries. Rather than compromise on women's issues, Lenin advised "flexibility" and opposed the mechanical transfer of examples of women's political practices from the center to the republics.<sup>31</sup>

Yet again in retrospect, it seems that this Leninist flexibility was later transformed into a Stalinist compromise over women's liberation in general - and Muslim women's liberation in particular - as long as it did not threaten women's entrance into the labor force or their contribution to economic development. As far as the ruling male elite



## "GUARDIANS OF THE NATION": WOMEN, ISLAM..

(basically the party members) was concerned, the Zhenotdel and women's clubs had outlived their state-determined purpose. During the very time (1930s) that the nativization policy terminated and the political autonomy of the local Muslim male elite eroded, it seems a subtle bargain or a tacit contract was made to leave intact the Muslim male's domination over his private territory, that is, women and the family. The local/native Azeri male elite, including the members of the Azerbaijan CP showed an increasing unwillingness to attack traditional patriarchal norms.

It is no surprise that the timing of this change coincided with the abolition of the Zhenotdel (1930) and Azeri women's clubs (1933), leaving the "woman question" basically at the mercy of the local/national male elite. In so doing, the Russian male elite managed not to cross the sensitive border of Muslim *namus* (honor), despite the massive integration of Muslim women into the workforce. On the orders of the head of the Azerbaijan CP, the Ali Bayramov Women's Club and its journal were purged and several of its leaders removed, criticized for "Trotskyism" and "deviation from the party line." By 1937, the club had become a mere shadow of the 1920s entity, turned into a *sa'adat sarayi* (palace of happiness) for the purpose of holding marriage ceremonies and wedding parties, an obvious reversion to the traditional family-oriented functions of a woman's club. One year later, the name of the main woman's journal, *Woman of the East*, was changed to *Woman of Azerbaijan*, and a new editorial board adopted a more traditional approach and noncontroversial language. Such a compromise is not unique to the Soviet context. Similar patterns have been observed elsewhere among opposing male elites:

State elites have discovered that promoting male domination contributes to the maintenance of social order in a period of state formation. . . . [L]eaders of new states share a set of problems: how to eliminate rival sources of power and at the same time provide material resources for the state and allegiance to the state. A common solution involves offering a bargain to (some) men: in return for ceding control over

political power and social sources to the state, they gain increased control over their families. Not only does this solution promote male domination, but it also establishes or strengthens a *distinction between public and private spheres, and subordinates the private sphere to the public.*<sup>32</sup> (emphasis added)

As Gregory Massell analyzes in the context of Soviet Central Asia, political institutionalization, stability, and uneven economic growth were purchased at the price of radical social transformation.<sup>33</sup> The liberation of women envisioned by Lenin himself and by earlier ideologues of socialism as well as their Azerbaijani counterparts was among the ideals that both Russian and Azeri male elites found the easiest to sacrifice.

In the entire Soviet Union, state mobilization campaigns reassured men that female employment would not interfere with women's domestic duties. But in the Muslim republics this reassurance had to go beyond domestic duties to encompass almost every behavior of women in public, especially those associated with ethnic identity, sexuality, and the code of honor - all seen as closely tied to Islamic religion.

## **V. The Role of Islam**

At the time of the Russian conquest of Azerbaijan and other Muslim communities, the ulema were seen as the most likely leaders of opposition to Russian rule. In order to control and co-opt the ulema, the czarist regime created the Sunni and Shi<sup>1</sup> ecclesiastical boards under state control. Each board had a president (called mufti for the Sunni, *shaykh al-Islam* for the Shi'a sects) appointed by the government.

Traditionally, mullahs (Muslim clerics) played important roles in Muslim society as prayer leaders, administrators, judges (qadis), and scholars. Russians had removed the qadis from the realm of civil and criminal law by the beginning of the twentieth century; they were

confined to recording births, deaths, and marriages. During Bolshevik rule, civil structures took over registration of marriages. But even before then, Russians had succeeded in curtailing the power or securing the support of the ulema and mullahs either by military force or administrative cooperation and by granting rank and privileges such as land, titles, and tax exemptions.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, a century of Russian rule in Azerbaijan had considerably undermined Islam long before the beginning of Bolshevik de-Islamization. This, along with a higher level of industrialization and modernization, may in part explain why it has been secular nationalism rather than Islam that played the primary role in opposing the Soviet regime in the country. It is important here to distinguish official Islam from unofficial Islam and to note how each operated in everyday lives of Muslim women and men in both czarist Russian and Soviet contexts. Tension and distrust between many Azeri people and the religious authorities (official Islam) have long been apparent due to the latter's<sup>1</sup> pro-state position, which even extended to confronting nationalists and democrats.

However, not in the Middle East, in the Russian empire, or in the Soviet Union has Islamic ideology reacted to Western modernization in any monolithic way. Although many Muslims shunned European secular modernity, those Muslims adhering to the Jadid movement sought change, reform, and modernization, particularly with regard to women's status. The reactionaries and traditionalists invoked Islam as the most effective and strongest means to resist change, including the emancipation of women. Yet the Jadids also resisted since they, for the most part, remained Muslim or maintained their Muslim identities; they sought change without detaching themselves from their people. After all, Muslims have long accepted the legitimacy of a periodic renewal (*tajdid*) of the community. But what that renewal means and should entail, particularly with regard to gender roles, has always been highly controversial.

Pressures on Islam in Azerbaijan intensified with the Bolshevik takeover after the October Revolution of 1917. Most mosques and other religious institutions were closed. Many Muslim nationalists and

Jadidists who made up the core of the native elite in Azerbaijan eventually joined the Russian communists, albeit retaining their own interpretation of Marxism and their own agenda for socialist Azerbaijan within a Muslim national communist framework. This concept was foremost a blueprint for national liberation. Given the revolutionary mood among the Baku oil workers and the rising national consciousness and advocacy of modernity among the Azeri elite at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Muslim national communism brought a necessary ideological metamorphosis for Azerbaijan.

Moreover, there has not been much animosity between Azeri secular modernist intellectuals and religion. They might criticize and ridicule mullahs and such practices as veiling and polygyny as incompatible with the true spirit of Islam, but they avoided denouncing Islam in its totality. To Muslim Jadids, many of the socialist ideas could easily blend with their own reform agenda. They believed that 'Islamic culture or way of life and Marxism are not by definition incompatible ideologies. On the contrary, they could coexist and even complement one another."<sup>35</sup>

Eventually, however, such coexistence proved not to be free from paradoxes and conflicts. Consequently, a duality characterized most cultural aspects in the lives of many, turning them into "Soviets in public, Muslim Azeris in private."<sup>3</sup> This duality manifested itself most clearly in the realm of gender ideology, as reflected in the words of Betura Mamedova, an Azeri woman professor of English in Baku: "Socialism has affected our life externally; our character and psychology, however, have remained basically unchanged."<sup>31</sup> Another Azeri woman, Rena Ibrahimbekova, a prominent psychologist and director of the Center for Gifted Children in Baku, confirmed this observation while raising her deep concern about many Azeri women's "tendency to avoid practicing their officially constituted equal rights. . . . I am worried that in the post-Soviet era, we may go back to our *adat va an'aneh* [traditions] in official level as well as eventually resolving the present duality in favor of its pre-modern regressive side."<sup>38</sup>

## VI. The Privatization of Religion

The ritualization of belief is apparently a common response for believers who have publicly had to come to terms with an antireligious order imposed by a dominant foreign force. Religion becomes essentially privatized and domesticated, displaying itself only through certain mores and rituals not seen as closely associated with religion, yet possessing an underlying base of religious feelings and emotions. The privatization of religion and other institutions of social life hinges upon the compartmentalization of public and private behavior, the latter being more authentic to one's nature and identity.<sup>39</sup>

Islam, like any other major religion, is a multidimensional institution with more than simply a corpus of directly spiritual beliefs and rites. It is, rather, a complex aggregate of cultural, psychological, and social traditions, attitudes, and customs governing a whole way of life.<sup>40</sup> One can argue, therefore, that the Soviet antireligious campaigns might have succeeded in minimizing its intellectual and ideological dimensions, but the experiential, consequential, and a certain level of the ritual dimensions of Islam, understood in a broad sense as the Muslim mode of life, have kept their vitality.<sup>41</sup>

Among the attitudes and practices that may be seen as Islamic mores and rituals, the ones associated with gender roles, sexuality, and life cycles maintained their relevance in Soviet Azerbaijan. Those related to male circumcision, sex-segregated mourning ceremonies, and means of testifying to a bride's virginity on her wedding night (*yengeh*), for example, might actually have been local customs preceding or superseding Islam but popularly viewed as Islamic. In fact, in a recent public lecture, Shaykh al-Islam - Allah-Shokur Pashazadeh, head of the Islamic Directorate of Transcaucasia and the highest religious authority in Azerbaijan, reprimanded the custom of *yengeh* as non-Islamic and detrimental to marriage and the family.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike in many contemporary Muslim countries, the gender discourse in the Azerbaijan independence movement has not gained a

Nayereh TOHIDI

doctrinal or ideological Islamist (fundamentalist) tone. So far, ethnicity, language, regionalism, and Islam - in its cultural, spiritual, and ritual forms - have served as the primary sources of national identity in the new republic. Nevertheless, the end result for women has been rather similar to the situation in those nations affected by Islamism. By turning the private or domestic domain into a bastion of resistance, gender roles and intrafamily dynamics have retained strong traditional and religious characteristics. In effect, women are expected to be the moral exemplars and primary carriers of this "religious load."<sup>43</sup>

Appearing in public without a male or an elder female chaperon, wearing pants, smoking or drinking in public, and driving cars are instances of behaviors widely viewed as unacceptable for an authentic Azeri woman. Ethnic loyalty and the observance of endogamy by women (but not necessarily men),<sup>44</sup> the cults of honor,<sup>45</sup> chastity, shame, prudery, and virginity before marriage are among the ethno-religious customs prescribed as essential female attributes. A woman is valued for her physical beauty, advanced education (especially among urbanites), endurance, self-sacrificing motherhood, docility and subservience toward her husband and in-laws, homemaking skills, hospitality, and delicacy. Such attributes constitute identity markers supposedly demarcating Azeris from "others," especially Russians and Armenians.

## **VII The Role of the Family and Ethnic Values**

Compared to Russia and the northern regions of the former Soviet Union, the family has remained the most conservative and stable institution in Azerbaijan. Its divorce rate is one of the lowest, even though it has risen slightly in recent years to less than 15 percent in 1990.<sup>46</sup> Although the nuclear family is the norm, particularly in urban areas, people still rely heavily on extended family norms and networks. Men and women remain deeply family-oriented, women being usually identified by their kin, male kin in particular.

Children are seen as great blessings. Baby girls are generally

welcomed, though with less joy than boys. Mothers have to start collecting dowry materials for a girl at infancy, since marriage remains the essential rite in the lives of Azerbaijanis. Ceremonies associated with it comprise the happiest, yet the most costly and demanding requirements, of the life cycle. In addition to an engagement party, two lavish wedding ceremonies (*qiz toyi* for the bride and *oghlán toyi* for the groom) take place. In many regions of the country, traditional customs like *bashlig* (the groom's payment to parents for nurturing the bride), *mahr* (an agreed sum to be paid to women in case of divorce), and *jahaz* (the dowry of household appliances and furniture provided by the bride's parents) are strictly observed.<sup>47</sup>

Divorced women, but even more never-married single women, suffer a social stigma, since mothering is regarded as women's primary role and most important source of gratification. Laws protecting mothers (those providing paid pregnancy and maternity leave for working mothers) remain on the books, though they are increasingly ignored in the new market economy. Thus far, the egalitarian civil family law that had replaced the Shari'a since the consolidation of the Soviet state has remained in force in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, protecting women's rights relating to marriage, divorce, and child custody. Enforcement of such laws, however, is becoming ever more difficult in the current transitional society. Double standards in sexuality continue while the family structure still appears patriarchal. Although individual preference and love are important, particularly among urban dwellers, the choice of spouse is generally supervised, if not actually made, by the family.

As among other nationalities in the Caucasus like Christian Armenians and Georgians, the primary loyalty of Muslim Azerbaijanis is still centered on kinship groups and intimate friends. This traditional family and kinship system entails paradoxical implications for male and particularly female members<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, it usually offers solidarity and trust. It can provide economic, political, emotional, and physical support during such difficult circumstances as the recent warfare. On the other hand, it operates as a

## 86 Nayereh TOHIDI

repressive device, limiting women's independence, individuality, and personal growth. Hence, many urban educated women express ambivalent feelings toward their respected yet male-protected status, as is indicated by Kifayat, a 37-year-old nurse working in a town near Baku:

One of the major difficulties in my life as a single woman is that I do not have any *arkha*, no father, no brothers. Russian women are luckier in this regard, as in their society a woman is accepted on her own. But in the case of an Azeri woman, people always ask, "Who is her man? Who is her guardian?" as if I am nobody without an *arkha*<sup>49</sup>

The persistence of the extended family structure has reinforced patriarchal norms. Some scholars have also attributed the prevalence of the underground economy and corrupt political practices in the Caucasus to this traditional heavy reliance on close familial ties.<sup>50</sup> Powerful obligations to one's relatives, clan, and region, especially on the part of women, may have delayed the constitution of citizenship and national-civic identity. This in turn may have contributed to the duality and dissociation in Azerbaijan's modernization in general and women's emancipation in particular.

It can be argued, on the contrary, that under a repressive state lacking a civil society with its network of political institutions mediating between the individual and the state, the family network becomes a substitute. The Soviet state was never actually hegemonic over people's ethnic and familial practices in the private sphere, where familial and religio-ethnic norms rather than the Soviet state ideology established the vision of the good and moral, especially with regard to women's behavior. One may even argue that kinship networks have been intentionally organized to resist the state and to function as a buffer against politico-economic pressures. Rather than "public" versus "private" binaries, some important parts of the public or political life have actually been constructed by family and kinrelated private, informal networks.

Political factors aside, certain economic constraints have



obviously contributed to the persistence of the traditional extended family structure. As in Soviet Russia, but even more so in the Muslim peripheries of the FSU, the state's emphasis on production and the reduction of the woman question to its economic base made women's massive entrance into the labor force a priority without instituting corresponding social and economic provisions for transforming the family structure and gender roles. The backwardness in food cycle technology, the housing shortage that forced young couples to live for years with their parents, and the insufficiency of child care facilities made restructuring of the patriarchal and extended family infeasible. Azerbaijan has especially suffered in this regard: for example, its child care and preschool education attendance has been one of the poorest in the former Soviet Union (16 to 18 percent versus 71 percent in Russia).

Mamedova represents another Azeri voice contrasting with that of Kifayat and of Rafibeyli resentment earlier expressed in "Kitchen Lines." Such contrasts are indicative of the contradictory implications, or the mixed blessing, offered by the traditional family structure :

We women are tenaciously clinging to our family and instead of getting weary of oceans of duties, we are energized by them. We are thought to be the backbone of the family and a buffer when things go wrong spiritually. We enjoy playing this role, because this is our life, and it is due to this family tenacity that Azeri people never forget their language, their culture and religion. One Azeri poet called it "blood memory" (*qanyaddashi*).

As one can infer from Mamedova's comment, women are seen again as the guardians of the nation who have succeeded in playing this role thanks to "family tenacity." Her statement also implies that in a colonial or quasicolonial, interethnic situation, the family would function as the bastion of resistance against assimilation (here Russification). The family thus becomes the *dor al-Islam* (domain of Islam) to be protected from the penetration of the dominant "other."

### VIII. The Pleasure of a Paradox

To an outside observer, the hierarchical structure of the family and society favoring male domination in Azerbaijan may appear more paradoxical than elsewhere in part because of the equal rights guaranteed by law, women's high level of literacy, and their massive presence in social and economic arenas, but many Azeri professional women seem to perceive this paradox differently. According to Mamedova, they consider it to be to women's advantage rather than disadvantage: "Our way of life might seem paradoxical to foreigners, but I want them to believe that our women enjoy living the pleasure of this paradox."<sup>52</sup>

It may be that dual realities result in dual perceptions, or the distinction between constructed realities of men and women explains the pleasure of this paradox. Pusta Azizbekova, a prominent academician in her seventies and director of the Azerbaijan Museum of History, explains:

Women's apparent subservient or male-dominated position is exactly that: apparent. . . . Why not? Like Russian and Western women, we enjoy equal rights and legal protection. But we feel even more privileged as, in addition to what they have, we also enjoy the respect, pampering and protection we receive from our men and families. I enjoy having men open doors and wait for me to enter, pay the bill when we go out, and shelter me when we walk in streets and public places. What is wrong with that?

And in response to the idea that protection makes women dependent, she replies:

Oh, it just appears that way. Only men think that we depend on them and by thinking so they feel satisfied and powerful. Let them take care of us under this illusion. We know very well who in reality is the power here and who

depends on whom. ...God forbid a household without a man. A man to a household is like a gem to a ring, we Azeris say. But the gem stands on top, is nothing without the ring.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps acting as assertive professional women in public, but showing docility and submission in private is a coping mechanism for Azeri women caught in the midst of the struggle against patriarchy on the one hand and the protection of their men's sense of masculinity in the Soviet quasicolonial context on the other. A further paradoxical observation is that some women seem to feel that the household is the only territory in which they can exert real power and that they are the owners of the entirety of their families. The husband is to be served in regard to everything, from bringing him a cup of tea to preparing the bathroom for his shower. At times there seems a deliberate attempt on their part to infantilize their husbands in order to keep them dependent on them in the household domain. Perceiving domestic responsibilities as empowering and gratifying rather than an oppressive burden is reflected in Mamedova's comment, not unusual from an Azeri woman:

The Azeri woman at work and at home is two, often radically different people. At work she looks confident, relaxed, and attractive. At home she is a busy bee because she has to see to a myriad of things: dusting, washing, cooking, sending children to school, checking their homework, scanning the daily newspapers (every family has to subscribe to newspapers), receiving uninvited guests. I can extend this list and you may stop believing me or you may ask what is the reward? And I will answer: the reward is *my* family and *my* children.<sup>54</sup> (emphasis added)

## IX. Conclusion

In Azerbaijan, both under the colonial rule of czarist Russia and within the quasi-colonial context of the Soviet regime, as well as during the recent post-Soviet nationalist and independent republic, Azeri women have been both objects and subjects of nation building

and identity politics.

Along with the "kitchen lines," identity politics have further circumscribed women's role in Azerbaijani society. The definition of womanhood in Soviet Azerbaijan was construed in part in contrast to the perceived image of Russian womanhood. Since the complete takeover of Azerbaijan by czarist Russians in the early nineteenth century, the dynamics of modernity and traditionalism pertaining to gender roles as well as other realms of social life have taken place in a contested context of Muslim Azeri "us" and non-Muslim Russian/Soviet "them."

As in Algeria, Egypt, and Iran when confronting colonial domination or foreign intrusion, women's liberation in Azerbaijan has been held hostage to the prescribed responsibility of women as the primary repositories of tradition and national and ethnic identity. Certain traditional images, customs, and stereotypes of femininity dubbed as *asil* (authentic) and *ismatli* (chaste) have been preserved to function as identity markers defining Azeris' ethnicity and demarcating them from Russians. That responsibility of women as symbols of the ethnic/national community has complicated the process of change in gender roles and interfered with progress toward gender equality.

Among the main institutions offering Azeris the opportunity to resist complete assimilation were the family and religion. But religion, privatized and domesticated, could function and be manifested essentially through the family and women or women-associated rituals. Thus to preserve Azeri boundaries, women were designated as Azeri identity markers and moral exemplars. By upholding of ethnic traditions (*adat va an'aneh*) and the Islamic faith, women became the main agents for sustaining those boundaries. Women, thus, relegated as they were to the margins of the formal polity, did play a central role in the informal politics of identity by nurturing ethno-cultural variables.

Women generally do continue to play their prescribed roles in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, but with certain new distinctions. Although they do not seem to shun the assignment of cultural and national

representation, they are seeking to expand, redefine, and at times subvert the parameters of Azeri authenticity and Islamic heritage.

This is perhaps the most challenging era for them. The state is not economically and legally as supportive of women's social and productive roles as it had been in the Soviet past, nor are free market rules femalefriendly. Moreover, Islam is no longer only a matter of private life to be preserved and practiced mainly by women. It is becoming increasingly politicized in the hands of men and rival political *entrepreneurs* at both the national and regional levels and is being manipulated in accordance with or in reaction to the exigencies of the new capitalistic realities or the old patriarchal gender arrangements.

Another major distinction from the Soviet totalitarian past is the multiplicity and diversity in almost all spheres of life. Given the rich human and natural resources of Azerbaijan and notwithstanding the current economic deterioration, Azeri women have a substantial potential in the longer term for higher achievement in their social status. They can assert their agency by taking advantage of the fluidity that has characterized both the meaning of Islam and the parameters of national, cultural, and gender identities.

### NOTES

1. See, for example, Sergei Poliakov, *Everyday Islam : Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia* (London: Sharpe, 1992).
2. The name of Azerbaijan is a continual point of contention. In this article, "Azerbaijani" or "Azerbaijanian" is used in reference to citizens of the Soviet and post-Soviet republic of Azerbaijan who are members of different ethnic groups within this territory. "Azeri," however, is used only in reference to the majority indigenous ethnic group (Turkic and predominantly Muslim) from whom the Republic of Azerbaijan derives its name. Rather than referring to south or north Azerbaijan as designated by Soviet Azeris, average Azeris in Iran used to distinguish their brethren in Russia and the FSU as the ones living on "the other side" (*otayli*), that is, the other side of the Araz River that makes up the natural border between the two parts of Azerbaijan.

3. See the report by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *CSCÉ Digest* 19, no. 1 (January 1996): 5-14.
4. *Jadid*, meaning "new" in Arabic, Turkic, and Persian, and *Jadidism*, derived from *usul-i jadid* (new methods), aimed at improving the curricula of the *maktab* (school) and their overall approach to teaching. In opposition to the conservative educators and ulema, known as *qadimists* (old thinkers), jadidism grew into a nationalist modernist interpretation of Islam because of the endeavors of the Crimean Tatar journalist Ismail Gasprinski. See Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30-35.
5. My book in Farsi (in progress) is based on Hamideh Javanshir's fascinating personal memoirs and observations on early twentieth-century Caucasia.
6. The journal was named after the legendary Molla Nasreddin (also called Nasreddin Hoja), a figure who appears in clever but didactic stories throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. The journal transcended nationality, and its articles were translated from Azeri-Turkic into many other languages. It was most influential in Iran, Turkey, Georgia, and Central Asia.
7. See Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, *Volga Tatars: Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).
8. See Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 56.
9. See Sabir Mamedova, *Put k progrecu* (Baku: Azerbaijan Dövlət Nəşriyyat komitəsi, 1986), 4.
10. Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 64.
11. Nasib Nasibzadeh, *Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası*. Magalalar və Sənədlər (Baku: Elm, 1990), 44, cited in Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 129.
12. For the full text of the poem, see Mirza İbrahimov (ed.), *Azerbaijan Poetry: Classic, Modern, and Traditional* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 374-378.
13. On women's education and health, see Nayereh Tohidi, *Situatsionniy Analiz Polozheniia Zhenshchin v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku: UNICEF, 1994).
14. Gail Lapidus (ed.), *Women in Soviet Society. Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

15. Mary Buckley, "Female Workers by Hand and Male Workers by Brain : The Occupational Composition of the 1985 Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet," *Soviet Union* 14, no. 2 (1987): 229-237.
16. On women's working conditions in Azerbaijan, see Tohidi, *Situatsionniy*. See also *Azerbaydjan Respublikaci Devlet Statistika Komitesi (Baku: Azerbaidzhan Dovlat Nashriyati, 1991)*.
17. Valentina Bodrova, "Glasnost and 'The Woman Question' in the Mirror of Public Opinion: Attitudes Towards Women, Work, and the Family," in *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*, ed. Valentine Moghadam (New York: Clarendon Press, 1993), 182.
18. For a comparable utilization of women as auxiliaries of the state and authoritarian statist modernization, see, for example, Suad Joseph, "Elite Strategies for State Building: Women, Family, Religion, and the State in Iraq and Lebanon," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 176-200.
19. See, for example, Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat. Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia ( 1919-1929)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), xxiii.
20. Almaz is a young radical and devoted teacher in a small Azerbaijani village who organizes women into a literary club and tries to educate them about the oppressive customs of the time (1920s). One of her own male co-workers together with the villages mullahs and landlords mobilizes many villagers against her. She is eventually spared from the crisis by joining the CP . See *Aydin Jabbarli, Jafar Jabbarli: Lyrika, Hekayalar, Piyeslar* (Baku: Yazichi, 1979).
21. For a detailed history of the club, see Azade-Aysa Rorlich, "The ' Ali Bayramov' Club, the Journal *Sharq Gadini* and the Socialization of Azeri Women: 1920-30 " *Central Asian Survey* 5, nos. 3-4 (1986): 221-239. and Tohidi (in progress).
22. The statue is particularly associated with the memory of a young Azerbaijani woman who was set on fire by her father and brothers for "dishonoring" them by her act of unveiling and joining a women's club in the 1920s.
23. Such extremely negative views about women's unveiling under Soviet rule are rare and came out during my interviews with the leading members of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, August 1994.24. See, for example, Fatma Abdollahzadeh, "Qadin va Jamiyyat," *Azerbaycan* (15

- October 1994), 3.
25. Hofrima Sultanova, *Sa' adat* (Baku: Azerbaidzhan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı, 1970).
  26. Ronald Suny, "Nationalist and Ethnic Unrest in the Soviet Union," in *The "Nationality Question" in the Soviet Union*, ed. Gail Lapidus (New York: Garland Publishers, 1992).
  27. For a detailed history of nation building in Azerbaijan, see Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*; and Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*.
  28. Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
  29. Suny, *"Nationalist and Ethnic Unrest,"* 28.
  30. Rorlich, *"The 'Ali Bayramov' Club,"* 232.
  31. Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 83.
  32. Sue Ellen Charlton, Jana Everett, and Kathleen Staudt (eds.), *Women, State, and Development* (New York: State University Press, 1989), 180.
  33. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 408.
  34. Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 57-62.
  35. Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism*, xx.
  36. Nayereh Tohidi, "Soviet in Public, Azeri in Private," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, nos. 1-2(1996): 111-123.
  37. Cited from her commentary on "Women in Azerbaijan," written at my request, December 1995.
  38. Author's interview in Baku, February 8, 1995.
  39. For an analytical elaboration on this, see Hank Johnston, "Religio-Nationalist Subcultures Under the Communists: Comparisons from the Baltics, Transcaucasia and Ukraine," *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 3 (1993): 237-255.
  40. Muriel Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1989), 13.
  41. My analysis here is based on a socio-psychological definition and theorization of religion originally formulated by sociologists like Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago.. Rand McNally, 1965).
  42. I was present during this lecture delivered in Baku, February 18, 1995, at a conference on "Wedding Customs in Azerbaijan" organized by the National Committee of Women.



43. For a comparable analysis, see Gillian Tett, "Guardians of Faith: Women in Soviet Tajikistan," in *Muslim Women's Choices*, ed. Camillia EI-Solh and Judy Mabro (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1994).
44. See my discussion on endogamy, interethnic marriage, and nationalism in Tohidi, "Soviet in Public."
45. The notion of honor (*namus*), so prevalent in the Muslim world, is a very loaded, multidimensional, and gendered term. One of its most important connotations is women's chastity, even though it is usually used in reference to men, because in both Shi'a Iran and Shi'a Azerbaijan the responsibility for the protection of *namus* falls primarily on the men. A woman's misbehavior, especially sexual misbehavior, brings shame and dishonor (*namussislig*) not only to her but even more so to her male "protectors": *father, brothers, and husband*. The findings of my studies in Azerbaijan attest to the continuing strength of the cult of *namus* among Azeris. In my sample, male respondents ranked *namus* as the most important theme in their early socialization and even more frequently than females did.
46. Tohidi, *Situatsionniy*, 12.
47. Hassan Quliyev, "Toy Adatlarimiz," paper presented at the Conference on Women and Wedding Customs in Azerbaijan, Baku, February 18, 1995.
48. For patterns similar to those of the Caucasus, see Suad Joseph, "Gender and Family in the Arab World" (Special *MERIP* Publication, October 1994).
49. Author's interview (interviewee preferred not to be identified so withheld last name), Baku, August 29, 1994. The word "arkha" literally means "back," implying kin, primarily male kin, to lean on.
50. Ronald Suny, "Transcaucasia: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society," in *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*, ed. Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger (Boulder. Westview Press, 1990),231.
51. Comments received from Betura Mamedova, an Azeri woman who taught at the college, in reaction to the author's earlier draft of this chapter, December 1995.
52. Ibid.
53. Author's interview, Baku, June 12, 1992.
54. Mamedova, December 1995.

Nayereh TOHIDI

*X ü I a s e*

**"MİLL TİN MÜHAFİZ ÇİL Rİ:  
AZ RBAYCANDA QADINLAR, ISLAM V  
MODERNL ŞM NİN SOVETD NQALMA MIRASI**

*Nayir TOHIDI*

*(Kaliforniya Dövl t Universit si, North Bridge, ABŞ)*

Yenid nqurma v aşkarhğm sovet siyas tin daxil olmasından sonra Sovet respublikalarının h r birinin populyar m d niyy tind b zi yeni Q rb ünsürl ri meydana çıxmağa başladı. Az rbaycanda bu ünsürl rin n bariz örn yi dükann, idar l rin, evl rin v bir çox ictimai yerlerin divarlarına yapışdımlan sanşm Türk göz ll rinin m ftunedici ş kill ri idi. Ancaq bir neçe ild n sonra Az rbaycan populyar m d niyy tin daxil olmuş bu yeni imaj - Türkiy nin göz llik kraliçası, başqa bir yeni imajla qarşılaşdı ki, bu da utancaq baxışlı, qapalı geyimli v ciddi görk mli bir müs lman qızının ll rini açıb Allaha dua etm sinin t sviri idi.

Bel likl , post-Sovet Az rbaycanınm populyar m d niyy tin bir-birin zidd olan iki yeni imaj girdi. Bunlardan birisi fiziki göz lliyi, Q rb modasını, istehlakçı kapitalist m d niyy tini v Türk milli kimliyini ks etdirdiyi halda, ikincisi ciddiyy tin, m n viyyatm, Islami d y rl rin v Müs lman kimliyinin ifad si idi. Bu iki imaj Az rbaycan c miyy tind ki gender münasib tl ri v t ş kkül tapmağa başlayan milli kimlik haqqında h miyy tli siqhallar verirdi. Bel ld, bütün bunlar post-Sovet Az rbayca- nında milli-m d ni kimlik m sl sinin mürekk bliyini, r ngar ngliyini v d yişk nliyini aşkara çıxarmaqla yanaşı, h m d dig r müst ml k v post-müst ml k l rd olduğu kimi, Az rbaycanda da gender m sl sinin irqi, milli, etnik, dini v sinfi kimlik m s l l riyl qoşalaşıb, onlarla iç-iç inkişaf etdiyini göst rdi. Bu is ; Az rbaycanda mövcud olan gender muna- sib tl rinin, dig r müs lman c miyy tl rind kil r çö^c oxşar olduğunu ortaya çıxanr.

Qeyd etm k lazımdır ki, h m çar Rusiyasının müst ml k si v Sovet rejiminin yan-müst mlek si dövl rind , h m d post-Sovet müst qil respublika dövründ Az rbaycanda qadmlar milli quruculuq v milli kimlik siyas tinin h m obyektli ri, h m d subyektl ri olmuşlar. Çar Rusiyasının ve Sovet Ittifaqınm hökmranlığı dövründ Az rbaycanda <sup>M</sup>qadınliq<sup>f</sup> m fhu- mu milli ad t- n n l rin qorunub saxlanmasınm, Az rbaycan qadmın rus qadmlarından v bel c d , Az rbaycan mill tinin rus mill tind n f rql n- dirilm sinin başhca amill rind n biri olmuşdur. Az rbaycan v rus mill t- İ ri arasmdakı f rqlerd n behs edidiyi zaman, h miş ilk növb d Az r-

baycan qadının rus qadınından fərqli olduğu ön planda tutulmuşdur. Məhz bu fərqliliklərin müsləman azərbaycanlılar tərəfindən dərk edilməsi, onların rusları özəl rindən ayrı olaraq görməsinə və bunun sayəsində, ruslar tərəfindən assimilyasiya olunmamasına səbəb olmuşdur. "Namuslu" və "isimətli" sözləriylə birgə işlədilərək "Azərbaycan qadını" ifadəsi, onu "rus qadını"ndan ayıran bu əsas keyfiyyəti ön plana çıxararaq, Azərbaycan və rus etnik, milli, mədəni xüsusiyyətlərinin və adət-nənələrinin eyniləşməsinə və ya Azərbaycan xalqının Sovet-rus mədəniyyəti içində əsinib yox olmasına qarşı maneə rolunu oynamışdır.

Bu mətnədə azərbaycanlıların assimilyasiya olunmasına qarşı cəmiyyətin güclü müqavimət göstərən qurumlarındən ailə olmuşlardır.

Sovet dövründə dinin ümumilliliyi ləğv edilib, fərqliliyi meydana çıxarıldıqdan sonra, dini qayda-qanunların yaşadılaraq davam etdirilməsinin əsas ictimai qurumu ailə oldu ki, ailə daxilində bu vəziyyət məhz qadın üzərində düşürdü. Beləliklə, milli adət-nənələri və dini qaydalan öz hərəkətləri və davranışında yaşadan Azərbaycan qadını, bu milli, mədəni, dini hədudların qorunub saxlanılmasının və davam etdirilməsinin əsas subyekt olmuşdur. Bu dövrdə, Azərbaycan qadını hər zaman olduğu kimi, necə ana olduğuna, neçə uşağı olduğuna, rindən sənəqətli və evdar bir xanım olub-olmadığına görə qiymətləndirilirdi və bütün bunlar "sl Azərbaycan qadını"ni xarakteriz edən əsas meyarlar olaraq qalırdılar.

Başqa sözlə desək, sosialist üsulu ilə modernləşmə prosesində qadınlara kişilərlə eyni hüquqlar verilməsinə baxmayaraq, qadının ailə və cəmiyyətdəki nənzivi rolu həmişə tənə bir dəyişikliyə uğramadı. Bunun nəticəsində Azərbaycan cəmiyyətində Sovet-öncəsi dövrdə qalmaqat gəndər münasibətləri də həmişə tənə dəyişmədi və Azərbaycan qadınının ictimai statusu çox da inkişaf etmədi.

Hal-hazırda yaşanmaqda olan post-Sovet dövründə isə, Azərbaycan qadını çox ciddi yeniliklər və tendensiyalarla qarşılaşmaqdadır. tənə dövlət, Sovet İttifaqındakımdən fərqli olaraq, qadınların cəmiyyətdəki nənzivi roluna (ailə qadınlığı və analıq vəziyyəti) iqtisadi və hüquqi dəstək verilmir. Bundan başqa, artıq İslam ailəsiyyətinə endirilmiş və əsasən qadınlardan davranış formasında özünü tapan bir etiqad olmayıb, cəmiyyətin bütün seqmentlərinə yayılmağa başlamışdır. Bütün bu yeniləşmələr daxilində, Azərbaycan qadını yeni iqtisadi və siyasi tendensiyalarla qarşılaşmaqdadır ki, bu da qadın cəmiyyətdəki nənzivi mövqeyində uzaqlaşmasına və ümumiyyətlə, Azərbaycan cəmiyyətində gəndər münasibətlərinin həmişə tənə dəyişməsinə səbəb ola bilər. Beləliklə, uzun müddət Azərbaycan qadınında "milli tənhəhafız çiliyi"ni edən qadınlar, yaranmış bu yeni vəziyyətdə öz yeni kimliklərini tələ edərək, öz ictimai statuslarını inkişaf etdirə bilərlər. Həmmə Azərbaycan cəmiyyətinin, həmmə Azərbaycan qadınının bunu etmək üçün potensialı vardır.