CHAPTER 20

State Feminism in Soviet Central Asia: Anti-Religious Campaigns and Muslim Women in Tajikistan, 1953–1982

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After 1945, the Soviet regime largely succeeded in putting an end to the practices of veiling (*paranji*), polygamy, child marriage and bride price (*kalym*) in urban areas. These, however, still existed in rural Tajikistan but were less commonly practised in comparison with the 1920s and 1930s. Like its predecessors, the Khrushchev government described these patriarchal practices as rooted in Islam. It regarded them as the primary cause of the lower educational attainment and high unemployment rate among rural Muslim women in Tajikistan. After a period of relative easing in relation to religion during and immediately after the Second World War, the Soviet regime renewed its attack against Islam and *feudal-bey* (patriarchal) practices. An atheistic campaign was launched in 1954.[1]

Whilst this atheistic campaign was not as aggressive as the Bolshevik attack on religion in the 1920s and 1930s, the Khrushchev regime established a vast, functioning apparatus for advancing atheism at all levels of society.[2] This chapter assesses the methods and rhetoric of the anti-religious campaign under Khrushchev, which specifically targeted women. It also examines some of the impacts that became more evident under Brezhnev (1964–1982). It explores the association between two major discourses of the post-war period: the emancipation of rural Muslim women and the attack on Islam. The anti-religious campaign in rural Tajikistan was intimately connected with Khrushchev's wider plans to improve rural living conditions and agricultural productivity throughout the Soviet Union.[3] The regime considered the elimination of religion an essential prerequisite for women's participation in paid

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labour and commitment to rural productivity.[4] Like the Stalinist regime, the Khrushchev administration believed that women's entry into the workforce would ensure their Sovietisation and ultimate liberation, and, most importantly, it would bring about the transformation of rural areas.

The Khrushchev regime focused on the elimination of religious consciousness in the minds of its citizens in order to accelerate the construction of communism. The regime's special focus on making atheists of rural women is most vividly reflected in its revival of the women's councils (*zhensovety*). The *zhensovety* were expanded particularly in regions where religious influence was deemed strong: the Catholic regions of the Baltics, Muslim Central Asia and areas in central Russia where the Russian Orthodox Church retained a strong foothold. In these places, women's social status was considered to be the most held back by tradition and the level of economic and cultural development, and it was in these areas that women's consciousness most needed to be raised.[5] In rural Tajikistan, the state renewed its attack on Islam and patriarchal practices such as veiling, bride price, polygamy and early marriages.

Post-war anti-religious rhetoric resembled the interwar campaigns whereby women were identified as victims of *feudal-bey* practices. These practices were believed to be rooted in Islam and enforced by native men, thus denying any female agency in religious beliefs and practices. The campaign represented Islam as oppressive and backward, and glorified Muslim women's new life under Soviet rule. Analysis of the *zhensovety*'s anti-religious campaigns shows that the regime maintained its top-down approach towards women's issues in the post-war period. Propaganda messages reveal the regime's lack of a deep understanding of rural culture and traditions in the Muslim periphery. Despite compelling descriptions of Islam as repressive and patriarchal, rural women in Muslim Tajikistan continued traditional religious practices and viewed them as integral to their identity. This eventually resulted in the 1970s under Brezhnev in the Soviet regime's tacit acknowledgement of failure and was reflected in a more relaxed approach towards religion. Moreover, the regime's use of the *zhensovety* in this unpopular agenda against Islam prevented the councils from potentially becoming a genuine avenue for women's mobilisation in Soviet Tajikistan.

Soviet literature on Muslim women was based on two major premises. First, there was a broad assumption that sexual equality and socialism were synonymous. Hence, the degree of women's integration into economic and political life was an indicator of both social 'progress' and women's 'emancipation'. This led to the promotion of women's education, paid employment and participation in political institutions. Analyses of women's social status were based solely on these quantifiable indicators. Secondly, it was assumed that Muslim women's pre-revolutionary status was that of an exploited class, degraded by veiling, discriminated against in matrimonial laws and customs. The historical writings about Muslim women by Soviet authors clearly reflect these fundamental assumptions.[6]

Soviet scholars S.A. Khalikova and R.M. Madzhidov attributed the persistence of Islam, particularly among women, to the rural female population's attachment to tradition, insufficient education and high unemployment.[7] Other factors included women's trauma and mourning over the loss of family members during the Second World War. Various Soviet surveys also suggested that the party and Soviet institutions were generally less concerned about girls' and young women's atheistic world view. Boys' and young men's, on the other hand, were of serious concern because they were presumed to be the future leaders of the political and economic life of the country.[8]

Western scholarship has largely focused on men's role in preserving and practising Muslim traditions: attending secret mosques, Sufi-brotherhood congregations, male circumcision and religious marriage ceremonies. Authors attribute the endurance of Muslim culture in the countryside to the relative lack of penetrative capacity by the Soviet state.[9] Gillian Tett's anthropological examination of rural Soviet Tajikistan is the only Western study of women's role in preserving Islamic practices and faith. According to Tett, unlike native Muslim men, women were less affected by the Soviet regime's ban on public religious displays since they performed their religious duties at home. She points out that while few men rigorously observed Ramadan during the Soviet period, women almost universally observed it. As one elderly Muslim man in Obi-Safed village observed: 'Before, if the men met together to pray, then there'd be trouble. The women, though – that was different. No one saw.'[10]

According to Tett, when a society seeks to maintain its cultural traditions in the face of outside pressure and an intrusive state, women can play a significant role in perpetuating religious activity. Women are vital in maintaining the religious life and identity of the community through private activity.[11] This chapter supports Tett's findings that rural Muslims learned to combine their Islamic identity with their Soviet identity by making their Soviet identity public while keeping their religious identity private. As a result, women assumed responsibility for preserving and maintaining the community's Muslim identity in private.[12]

Irina Paert illustrates similar findings in Soviet Russia, where Russian women promoted religious culture in the family through the maintenance of rituals, festivities and diet. The celebration of Christmas and Easter, made special by traditional cuisine, remained central for Russian Orthodox families throughout the Soviet period.[13] In Soviet Tajikistan, women served as the main practitioners and guardians of traditional Tajik culture and Muslim values. Tett argues that this distinction between public and private, male and female, was why most households in rural Tajikistan were able to combine the two identities of being Muslim and communist without finding them contradictory.[14]

Sergei Poliakov explains Muslim women's higher religiosity in the post-war period in Soviet Tajikistan as due to the difference in girls' socialisation and upbringing: more emphasis was placed on the religious education of girls than boys. Mothers and grandmothers taught girls how to maintain proper behaviour and observe traditional social norms. During girls' formative years, they

also received instructions from a *bibiotun*, a female religious educator.[15] Despite the Bolshevik regime's earlier crackdown on Islam, rural Tajik women maintained their religious identity in the interwar period. This prompted the Khrushchev regime to focus on women in its attack on Islam. No scholarship on the tactics, extent and impact of the renewed anti-religious campaign in rural Muslim Tajikistan, however, has yet appeared.

As Abeed Khalid explains, the Bolsheviks' attack on Islam had two major outcomes. Firstly, Islam was localised and became synonymous with custom and tradition. The regime abolished all religious institutions, thus making the family the only vehicle for the transmission of Islam. The limited availability of religious knowledge resulted in a homogenisation of Islam since other interpretations of Islam were removed.[16] Islam became a marker of identity that distinguished locals from outsiders in Central Asia. It was deeply linked to local cultural practices and national attributes defined by the Soviet regime itself. A wide range of traditional practices, including weddings, funerals, paying respect to elders, placing high value on the family—including extended family, valuing hospitality and many others came to be seen as local and Muslim. According to Khalid, many of these practices were indeed rooted in Islam, part of the fulfilment of life-cycle rituals. Many other traditions that had little to do with Islam also became Muslim holidays. Most importantly, these local customs and traditions represented a paradox in the Soviet understanding of identity. On the one hand, these traditions were essential nation-building tools used to glue a new nation together. On the other hand, they were described as backward and in need of eradication. The Bolsheviks' extensive attack on these traditions succeeded to a considerable degree. The regime replaced these backward traditions with new Soviet ones.[17]

Compared to the 1920s and 1930s, the late Stalinist regime produced a favourable environment for religious revival. During the Second World War, the regime relaxed its approach towards Islam and religious traditions largely in order to mobilise the Muslim men of Central Asia for the war effort. Registered mosques were permitted to operate in a limited fashion, and private religious practices were tolerated. In 1943, the creation of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was approved.[18] Instead of seeking to eliminate all religious practices, Stalin opposed only those that directly challenged the regime. Even after 1945, Stalin retained this less confrontational approach toward religion. These experiences shaped religious identity among Muslim Central Asians. The Muslim population of Tajikistan learned to combine its new Soviet identity with its traditional Muslim identity.

After 1954, Khrushchev publicly denounced Stalin and, along with his ideological advisers, sought to restore the early Bolshevik approach towards religion. The Khrushchev regime relaunched an attack against Islam in order to eradicate the remaining archaic traditions, particularly in the countryside. The party removed the old staff who had established friendly amiable relationships between religious institutions and the state. The state criticised local and central authorities for leniency towards religious activism and proposed a programme

for a crackdown on religion.[19] The renewed campaign was followed by closure of unauthorised places of worship and persecution of unregistered clergy. The government ordered the Department of Propaganda and Agitation to conduct a cycle of lectures in universities and to train cadres of anti-religious propagandists. The ministries of culture of all the Soviet republics and the *Znanie* (Knowledge) society were tasked with producing detailed plans for the improvement of atheistic work. At the government's initiative, *Znanie* established a monthly popular journal, *Nauka i religiya* (*Science and Religion*), with a print run of 75,000.[20] The state instructed the republic-level ministries of education and the trade unions to strengthen their promotion of atheism among youths and workers, with special attention paid to women.[21]

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was intimately connected with his wider policies of rural modernisation and cultural change. While travelling through the countryside in 1953 and 1954, Khrushchev observed economic and social degradation and concluded that rural problems were rooted in the religiosity of the local people.[22] The state viewed religious influence on Soviet rural populations as the major obstacle to a full mobilisation of the populace, and especially of women to the workforce. Khrushchev asserted that the formation of a modern Soviet socialist countryside was to be accompanied by the emergence of genuinely Soviet, atheistic citizens. He promised to transform rural areas into a model of socialist modernity by eradicating religion.[23] Yet these promises of rural reforms were not accompanied by infrastructural changes, such as the creation of day care facilities, secondary schools, career training centres and employment beyond manual jobs on collective farms. As Melanie Ilic states in her close examination of the Khrushchev reforms: 'The regime reinvigorated the "woman question" in the Soviet Union, but it by no means solved it.'[24]

Khrushchev presented Muslim women as victims of patriarchal society and objects of male manipulation. Islam was continually depicted in official reports as the main source of oppressive patriarchal traditions.[25] Propagandists called for an intensified anti-religious campaign and the dissemination of more information on subjects such as science and culture through the mass media.[26]

With few exceptions, the Soviet government's approach towards Islam claimed that fathers, brothers and husbands were the perpetrators and enforcers of patriarchal practices. In the early 1960s, a secret report by the head of the Tajik SSR Supreme Court underpinned these assumptions with statistical data on rural criminality, which showed that most of the *feudal-bey* crimes in Tajikistan occurred in rural areas.[27] Collective farm workers and farmers committed 85% of all patriarchal crimes, including polygamy, underage marriages and bride price. The remainder were committed by working-class men and those in administrative positions.[28] The report identified the southern regions of Regar, Kuibeshevskii, Moskovskii, Shaartuzskii and Sovetskii and the northern regions of Ura-Tyube, Kanibadam, Isfara and Pendzhakent as the epicentres of these crimes.[29]

Subsequent atheistic messages portrayed native men as the main obstacles to women's full involvement in social and economic life:

> Men with old mentalities are to blame for the persistence of patriarchal practices. They force their wives, daughters and sisters to wear *paranji*. We know of many cases when a young woman who grew up in Soviet society with new values is forced into early marriage and required to take up veiling. Why? Because her husband, father or brother prohibits her from walking in public without *paranji* … we assert that the majority of women still wearing a veil do so because of men. After all, the majority of our leaders are native men. These men have forgotten that they live in the Soviet Union.[30]

The propagandists implied that patriarchal practices persisted in rural society because native government officials were not genuinely interested in eradicating them. The Secretary of Pendzhakent publicly acknowledged this:

> We still see a *feudal-bey* approach toward women, including *chapanchi* and violence against women. While the Soviet regime introduced major reforms in the lives of our female comrades, Tajik women are not completely liberated. This is chiefly because indigenous men are the administrators of our laws and policies, including those pertaining to women's organisations and activities.[31]

Reports claimed that party members and government officials were not interested in challenging feudal practices because they personally took part in bride price, polygamy and women's seclusion and often forced their wives and daughters to veil when in public.[32]

Government reports also described women's seclusion as a reality in the majority of households, even the homes of political leaders and members of the intelligentsia: 'A woman is not allowed to welcome guests who come to her house. Sometimes she might enter the room to bring food but has to leave immediately. We vigorously fight against these traditions that are disrespectful to women.'[33] Stories identifying specific native men in leadership positions who enforced patriarchal practices were featured in the mass media, including the journal *Molodoi kommunist* (*Young Communist*):

> Pulatova Gul'chekhra was an active member of Komsomol in the Tadkhikabad *raion*. Now she is the wife of the head of *kolkhoz* Pobeda in Pyanj *raion*, Khasanov. He married her when she was fifteen years old, while she was in seventh grade. After marriage, she stopped her social activism and quit school. She no longer pays her Komsomol membership fees. Her husband discontinued her studies and forced her to forget about Komsomol duties. As a Soviet leader, instead of serving as a respectable example, Khasanov committed a serious crime … It's sad that some of our leaders, including teachers are often the carriers of such feudal mentality.[34]

If local Communist Party members and prominent leaders upheld these practices, there can be little doubt why so few rural women entered the workforce or continued their education. Propaganda claimed that because these Communist Party members, Komsomol activists, members of local party organisations, teachers and secretaries were forcing their wives, sisters and daughters to wear *paranji* and enforcing their seclusion, these women were not able to attend school or enter the workforce.[35] As in earlier campaigns, women were seen as powerless victims who did whatever their men told them. No female agency was acknowledged.[36]

When urban women activists visited rural areas and observed a significant percentage of rural women wearing *paranji*, they described it as a forced practice. These rural women were rarely interviewed or asked to explain why they wore *paranji* and practised Islamic traditions. Urban activists described veiling as 'imposed by men' and 'loathed by women'.[37] One report noted:

> Our socialist culture and *paranji* cannot be combined. Veiling makes it difficult for women to adjust to the new Soviet life and hides them from the light of our Constitution. *Paranja* is not women's fault. We know that our girlfriends take off their *paranjas* when they arrive in urban areas and observe the new Soviet life with open faces and happy eyes. Our women are tired of the black veil. This veil is a gloomy remnant of the past, loathed by our women, including those who have not been brave enough to take it off.[38]

In post-war Tajikistan veiling was more common in rural than urban areas. Urban women activists who had direct conversations with rural women in Zafarabad, in northern Tajikistan, were told that the situation had calmed down during the war and nobody criticised women wearing *paranji* anymore. Women were able to walk around town freely wearing *paranji* again.[39]

Veiling was not simply a remnant of the feudal past but also a major obstacle for women's entry into and active participation in the paid labour force. By the 1950s, it was clear that collectivisation had largely failed to establish modern agriculture and transform rural culture. Women's labour was regarded as an essential element for the revitalisation of the countryside. As a result, calls to Muslim women to take off their veils were consistently accompanied by appeals for them to join the workforce and help increase production:

> Women in rural areas are a major work force. To keep this labour force away from production is a crime … Let's deliver cotton for the freedom we have received from the Koran and Sharia. Women's oppression is now a forgotten tale. The Soviet regime gave women a new life; a bright future and a happy life. The state drew a new path for us. We shouldn't lag behind the construction of this great work. I call on our rural girlfriends to join our fight against *feudal-bey* practices, throw off your *paranji* and promise to deliver twelve thousand kilograms of cotton per season.[40]

In the state-sponsored attack against Islam, it was veiling that received the most attention. Writers wrote novels, filmmakers produced movies and theatres staged plays about women's struggles, most notably against the *paranji*.[41] The prominent Tajik poet Mirzo Tursun-Zade dedicated a poem to the subject called 'The Three Beauties':

> In *paranji* like in the tomb, Tajik women buried their youth
> Mother and daughter, daughter-in-law and sister, were hidden by the veil from the world
> Black like cloud hid spring from young girls' face
> The land was a desert where you were a slave
> For us this is a far away history now.[42]

The Khrushchev regime's focus on women in its drive against religion also had pedagogical and disciplinarian dimensions. The Soviet state proudly pronounced its campaign as a struggle against social injustice and oppression, promising to bring women to a fulfilling and meaningful life outside the prison of religion. As a result, the atheistic crusade consistently compared Muslim women's new lives with the pre-revolutionary past:

> Before the Russian Revolution, Muslim women of the East had no rights. Their exploiters convinced them that they were men's slaves. Islam not only allowed men to sell women but also permitted their murder. The archaic mentality considered the birth of girls a curse. It was better to give birth to a rock. With these words parents celebrated a baby girl's birthday. There were various religious laws that humiliated the human dignity of women. One such custom was women's isolation from the outside world through the *paranji* – a black prison of slavery. She was completely separated from public life. It was not easy for our women to take off *paranji* … The most oppressed of all oppressed – Eastern women – outlasted obstacles and overcame their subjugation. Take off your veils, sisters, and get in line with the builders of happiness and freedom.[43]

These messages were aimed at mobilising rural women's support in the fight against Islam and *feudal-bey* practices by reminding them about their destitute lives before the October Revolution. They were likewise intended to make Muslim women appreciate and value their new, happy lives under the Soviet regime. According to Paert, by emphasising women's liberation from religion, Khrushchev's regime also asserted a revolutionary role.[44]

The regime continued to depict Muslim men as perpetrators of patriarchal practices and women as victims of these practices. Yet unlike the earlier Bolshevik campaign, government institutions promoted a new image of the Soviet Tajik woman. One new Soviet woman personally declared war against patriarchal practices and publicly condemned her patriarchal husband:

> My husband's a Communist and a promoter of feudal practices. He often uses physical force against our children and me. He banned our daughters from

> attending school. When I express objection to his demands, he forces me out of the house and threatens to marry a younger woman. I've been living like this for eighteen years now. I'm here to seek the party organisation's assistance.[45]

This message was most vividly conveyed in a famous Tajik movie *Zumrad* produced in 1961 by the state-controlled movie industry. After graduating from secondary school, the eponymous Zumrad travels to Dushanbe to continue her education. Soon she meets and falls in love with her professor, Kadyrov, who charms her with his progressive communist views and his familiarity with Persian poetry. However, after marriage he shows his true face as a *fiodal* (patriarch). He secludes Zumrad from the outside world and forces her to quit her studies. After she gives birth to a daughter (not a son), Kadyrov becomes insolent and beats her. Zumrad breaks with traditional mores and runs away to her native village. There she becomes a respected collective farm brigadier and cultivates cotton. She eventually reunites with her secondary school sweetheart, Jalil. *Zumrad* was screened around the country for free.[46]

Zumrad was part of the post-war campaign that called on women to fight against religious traditions and patriarchal social norms on a personal level.[47] Zumrad depicted a proactive communist woman who determined her and her daughter's future by leaving an oppressive husband. Eventually she found happiness by dedicating herself to full-time work and social activism. As part of this campaign, women were entreated to 'Take off your *paranji* without fear!' and were assured that 'Laws will protect you!'.[48] These slogans followed appeals to women to learn the constitutional rights granted to them by the Soviet regime. Authors of propaganda literature maintained that it was women's fault for allowing men to abuse them. The reports insisted: 'We severely punish men and government officials who undermine women's rights and create obstacles to women's active participation in social and political life of the republic, yet often women personally choose not to practise their legal rights.'[49]

The post-war Soviet state's clampdown on religious custom ensured that most visible practices had disappeared by the late 1950s, thus dramatically changing the image of Muslim women. Veiling and polygamy were probably harder to hide from the state than underage marriage, bride price and other traditions. As a result, there were fewer reports about veiling from the late 1960s through to the 1980s. Muslim women eventually replaced *paranjis* with small headscarves that only covered the hair.[50] As for polygamy, the official problems associated with having two wives increased over time, especially if both produced children who had to be registered with the state. Marrying an underage girl, however, could be kept secret until she reached the authorised marriage age of 18. This practice was also featured in *Molodoi kommunist*:

> Mekhriniso Narzulaeva is the only girl among fourteen boys to graduate from the Gorky secondary school in Iava region. For this reason she is facing social disapproval. All of her female classmates dropped out of the school after sixth grade in order to get married. Parents obtain fake birth certificates to marry their daughters

> before the legal age. Mekhriniso's parents were not an exception to this social norm. While her father was happy that she was able to continue her education, her mother was in a hurry to marry her off. Only with her father's support and Komsomol assistance was Mekhriniso able to pursue a degree from the Shevchenko Pedagogical Institute. She was the first woman in her region to continue her education beyond secondary school.[51]

As the article accurately suggests, Muslim women were the primary actors in charge of maintaining and endorsing traditional customs. Practices such as early marriage, bride price, and lavish wedding and funeral ceremonies remained an integral part of rural culture. Mothers were in charge of arranging their children's marriages. It was usually women from the groom's household who made the first move. The groom's mother would approach the bride's mother. Negotiations took place primarily between the mothers of the two families. Some official reports noted that it was women who insisted that practices such as male circumcision, religious wedding ceremonies and other traditions be carried out.[52]

Dzhamilya Islamova, the first woman computer engineer in the Leninabad region, similarly described women as promoters of some of the practices the regime viewed as patriarchal and imposed by men. She recalled a funeral she attended in Isfara in the 1960s where the deceased man, a prominent doctor in the village, left a will strictly instructing his family: 'When I die, make sure that nobody wears mourning clothes. My wife and three daughters should wear mourning clothes but only for three days.' The deceased man explained in his note that he wanted to be buried according to Islamic tradition, but this mourning tradition was not based on the Koran.[53] After the will was read, the *mahalla* men nodded in agreement and promised to acknowledge this last wish, yet the women present at the funeral objected to it. One loudly declared: 'Why wouldn't this family wear mourning cloth? We all had to do it in the past. Our grandmothers practised this tradition, why does this family have to be an exception?''[54]

An example of the discontinuity between the centre and the periphery in the regime's anti-religious campaign is reflected in the atheistic literature's explanations of women's religiosity. Propaganda argued that apart from age and the usual lack of education and employment, a lack of emotional fulfilment was an important cause of rural women's attraction to religion.[55] Although the authors denied biological causes of female religiosity, they nevertheless emphasised women's aesthetic desire for beauty. Official reports claimed that for this reason religious officials were able to mobilise women's support.[56]

As a result, women were actively encouraged to participate in music, dancing and other creative activities.[57] The regime believed that women's engagement in such activities could provide an outlet for their need for artistic fulfilment.[58] During the post-war era, the Soviet regime recruited women to art and music clubs, and to theatre and dance performances. Official reports proudly claimed, 'Hundreds of indigenous women were recruited to work in the sphere of culture

and literature. One could not even imagine this in the feudal darkness of the Bukhara.'[59] These announcements were accompanied by stories of rural girls who had never attended the theatre or opera.[60] There was a lack of cultural activities for women and girls in the countryside; there were no theatres or dance, music or poetry clubs in rural areas.[61] Urban women took advantage of Soviet cultural activities and facilities that remained unavailable outside the cities.

Soviet sociologists' characterisation of rural women's religiosity was not necessarily incorrect. Yet the image of an emancipated Tajik woman determined to be professionally and personally successful that was constructed by the secular culture of the Khrushchev era now competed with images maintained by popular memory.[62] Consider, for example, the reminiscences of Bihodzhal Rakhimova, a prominent government official. Based on her memory of post-war Soviet Tajikistan, women, including urban and rural government officials, identified themselves as both Muslim and Soviet: 'Combining these two identities did not preclude one from utilising official Soviet discourse and leading a normal Soviet life'; she noted further:

> I was a government official, which often involved hosting senior officials at my house. Based on our Tajik tradition before sending guests off, my mother would have to say a blessing; instead of mentioning Allah, she'd mention Lenin, Marx and Engels. Instead of concluding with 'Amin', she'd say 'proletarians of all countries unite' and would run her hands over their faces. These were tough times; one couldn't express any religious sentiments, especially me since I worked for the Communist Party, which preached universal atheism. But I'd constantly say '*Bismillahu Rahmoni Rahim*' [In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful]. I'd observe these traditions but get on the podium and criticise people who practised religion, I'd punish those who attended mosques and read prayers.[63]

While Soviet ideology emphasised the dramatic differences in the images of new and old Tajik women, many seemed to ignore these distinctions. Local authorities participated in the anti-religious campaign to varying degrees. Soviet celebrations included International Women's Day (8 March), Labour Day (1 May), Victory Day (9 May), October Revolution Day (7 November) and other holidays. Muslim women, including government officials and members of the intelligentsia, continued to take part in both religious and Soviet cultural events, without necessarily adhering to the supposedly contradictory meaning of either.[64]

That some native women leaders felt comfortable publicly proposing the incorporation of useful aspects of religion in ideological work, among other things, speaks of the non-threatening nature of the post-war attack on religion. This is vividly illustrated at the Tenth Annual Congress of Women in 1972, when a woman doctor, Sofia Hafizovna Khakimova, suggested embracing some Islamic norms to facilitate good habits among rural woman. After all, she insisted, 'the Koran prohibits women from fasting when they're breastfeeding

… Maybe we should utilise these useful aspects of religion to teach our women good practices, especially in terms of hygiene.'[65] Khakimova's suggestion provoked uproar in the auditorium. The majority of women activists disagreed with her. M. Gaffarova, professor of philosophy, head of the Pedagogical Institute in Dushanbe, responded first: 'We have to be cautious about using old traditions since they can turn against us, especially positive aspects of Islam. We need to address these questions with a highly scientific approach, not with religion and the Koran.'[66] Comrade Fadeeva followed:

> All nations have well-established traditions but as comrade Gaffarova rightly pointed out some of these traditions have dangerous powers. Orthodox Christianity also has useful aspects to it. It preaches not to harm, not to steal, not to kill, but we shouldn't use that either. We must only use our Communist positions to address our problems since Communism has the moral codes that form the basis of our lives, not religion.[67]

H.F. Gaffarova, assistant head of the *zhensovet* presidium and Deputy Minister of Commerce, ended the discussion by thanking Khakimova for her presentation and told her to avoid using the Koran and Islam in future and to base everything on scientific facts.[68]

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was ultimately a failure, not because it did not manage to eliminate religious expression in public, but because it failed to convince believers in Russia and Muslims in the periphery that religion and the Soviet system were wholly incompatible.[69] While the regime forced women to enter the workforce and rural women eventually threw off their veils, fasting and traditional practices continued in the countryside. In the mid-1970s and 1980s, the failure of central and local governments to eradicate Islam and religious practices among women in rural Tajikistan was evident. In 1973, Z. Muradova and M.K. Karimova, members of the Gissar *zhensovet,* reported that anti-religious work among rural women had been ineffective: 'Rural women still practise religion, women take pilgrimage trips, practise circumcision celebrations, take part in religious wedding ceremonies.'[70] V. Ahmedova, head of the culture department, similarly declared: 'Our women are still religious; this is especially evident during religious holidays when the production level declines drastically and women skip work.'[71]

As a result, in the 1980s, Karimova called for increasing rural women's access to education and cultural facilities in order effectively to fight against Islam in the countryside:

> The majority of women in rural areas practise Islam and force their children, especially daughters, to observe religious rituals and practices, including Ramadan when women and children fast. Over 75.6 per cent of women celebrate Ramadan in the countryside. The atheistic education of women should be our priority.[72]

The ineffectiveness of the anti-religious campaigns in rural areas triggered a new approach in the 1970s. Journals and newspapers, including *Zanoni Tojikiston* (*Women of Tajikistan*), *Nauka i religiya*, *Kommunist Tadzhkistan* (*Communist of Tajikistan*) and other forms of mass media published articles about these new approaches towards their anti-religious work. In 1974 *Nauka i religiya* published an interview with Ibodat Rakhimova, member of the Presidium of the Tajik Supreme Soviet (in office 1978–1982) regarding the government's new tactic:

> The household is a very delicate sphere. Before we enter it with our ideological information, we must have a thorough understanding of its taboos. A single insensitive word can trigger rejection and make a woman indifferent and immune to atheistic campaigns. The party calls on us to increase our attack on religion, to apply diverse approaches, to stop using the same ideological propaganda, to apply approaches that are individually tailored, influence person's feelings and consciousness, to speak from the heart and use emotions, persistently introduce Soviet rituals and traditions. We are currently trying to mobilise new women campaign workers but there are still not enough of them. Before we assign a woman to carry out an atheistic campaign, we must ensure that she is articulate and knows how to carry out atheistic work properly, to ensure that she does not do more damage than good.[73]

Rakhimova pointed out that any future anti-religious campaign would:

> … specifically clarify that feudal traditions have nothing to do with Tajik heritage, that these are local and regional customs. What can expensive religion-based funerals have in common with Tajik heritage and national ethics? Or what can wedding rituals, when a *mullah* preaches to a young bride about family, have in common with our modern principles and progressive traditions of the Tajik nation?[74]

The Soviet regime under Brezhnev and his successors made a tacit change of approach towards Islam and traditional practices in the Muslim periphery. It was during the Brezhnev period that many national traditions, including lavish weddings and funerals, circumcision of boys, eating with one's hands rather than with utensils and other practices became acceptable.[75]

The post-war Soviet campaign against Islam in Tajikistan reflects the central authority's lack of in-depth understanding of the role of religion and identity in the periphery. The regime believed that introducing women to Soviet lifestyle and rituals would not only ensure their entrance into the labour force, but also result in their complete transformation. The post-war regimes of Khrushchev and Brezhnev eventually managed to pressure rural Muslim women to enter the workforce and replace their veils with small headscarves. However, this dramatic visual transformation was not accompanied by the eradication of Islam. For the majority of the native people in Tajikistan, especially in rural areas, Islam and religious practices remained an integral part of their identity, despite, or

paradoxically because of, the Khrushchev regime's overt attempt to eliminate these practices. In the post-war period, the rural Muslim populace in the periphery simply ignored the regime's attack on their religious traditions.

Notes

1. Genia Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987, p. 93.
2. Joan Delaney Grossman, 'Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Policy and the Campaign of 1954', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1973, p. 386.
3. Andrew B. Stone, 'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness: the Khrushchev Antireligious Campaign and the Rural Soviet Union,' *Russian Review*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2008, p. 301.
4. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: the Man and His Era*, New York: Norton, 2003, pp. 228–30.
5. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR,* p. 55. See also, Melanie Ilic, 'What did Women Want? Khrushchev and the Revival of the *Zhesovety*', in Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith (eds.), *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, London: Routledge, pp. 104–21.
6. For Uzbekistan, see R.Kh. Aminova, *The October Revolution and Women's Liberation in Uzbekistan*, Moscow: Nauka, 1977.
7. See S.A. Khalikova, *Zhenshchiny sovetskogo Tadzhikistana*, Dushanbe: Donish, 1949; R.M. Madzhidov, *Osobennosti formirovnaya ateisticheskogo mirovozzreniya zhenshchin*, Dushanbe: Donish, 1977.
8. See, for example, John Anderson, 'Out of the Kitchen, Out of the Temple: Religion, Atheism and Women in the Soviet Union', in Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 210.
9. Helene D' Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State*, 1917–30, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992; Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, New York: Praeger, 1967; Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, London: Croom Helm, 1983; Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars, Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: a Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979.
10. Gillian Tett, 'Ambiguous Alliances: Marriage and Identity in a Muslim Village in Soviet Tajikistan', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1996, p. 136.
11. Tett, 'Ambiguous Alliances', pp. 15–16.
12. See also Eren Tasar, 'Soviet Policies toward Islam: Domestic and International Considerations', in Phillip Muehlenbeck (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War: a Global Perspective*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012.
13. Irina Paert, 'Demystifying the Heavens: Women, Religion and Khrushchev's Anti-religious Campaign, 1954–64', in Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood (eds), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004, p. 207.

14. Tett, 'Ambiguous Alliances', p. 196.
15. Sergei P. Poliakov, *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, p. 73. See also Habiba Fathi, 'Gender, Islam, and Social Change in Uzbekistan', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2006, pp. 303–17.
16. Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p. 82.
17. Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 81–2.
18. Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 12.
19. Grossman, 'Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Policy', p. 378.
20. *Znanie* (Knowledge Society) was formed in 1947 to replace the League of Militant Godless. Under Khrushchev, it mostly carried out anti-religious work. In September 1959, it produced the first issue of *Nauka i religiya*.
21. Grossman, 'Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Policy', p. 378.
22. Grossman, 'Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Policy', p. 375.
23. Taubman, *Khrushchev*, pp. 228–30.
24. Ilic, Reid and Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, p. 22.
25. See, for example, PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/3/81 (1961).
26. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/3/81 (1961).
27. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/122–3 (1962).
28. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/129 (1962).
29. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/130 (1962).
30. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/48 (1950). *Paranji* (Tajik), *paranja* (Russian), *burqa* (in other languages) is a traditional female robe used in Tajikistan, particularly prior to the Russian Revolution; it fully covers the head and body.
31. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/178/14/40 (1962). *Chapanchi* is a horsehair veil covering the entire face.
32. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/130/103/102 (1960).
33. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 36/6/447/28 (1958).
34. A. Kronov, 'Tadzhikskie devushki i zamaskirovannye feodaly', *Molodoi kommunist*, no. 6, 1962, p. 71.
35. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 36/6/447/28 (1958).
36. Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2010, p. 192.
37. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/129/385/169 (1960).
38. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/47 (1950).
39. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/149/320/105 (1958).
40. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/92 (1950).
41. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/1/41–3 (1963).
42. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/6/7 (1967–69).
43. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/130/103/11 (1960).
44. Paert, 'Demystifying the Heavens', p. 218.
45. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/91 (1950).
46. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/155/30/9 (1962).
47. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/91 (1950).
48. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/93/14/49 (1950).
49. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/202/1/98 (1963).
50. Author interviews with women in rural areas of Tajikistan (2010–14).

51. Kronov, 'Tadzhikskie devushki i', pp. 69–71.
52. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/130/103/36 (1960).
53. Author interview with Dzhamilya Islamova (October 2012). Tajik cultural traditions required immediate female family members to wear black/dark clothes for approximately a year as part of the mourning process.
54. Interview with Islamova.
55. Paert, 'Demystifying the Heavens', p. 216.
56. PAIPI TsIK KP RT *3/246/15/38 (1972–73)*.
57. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/269/18/30 (1971).
58. Paert, 'Demystifying the Heavens', p. 216; see also Ali Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2012.
59. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/1/41 (1963).
60. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/269/18/28 (1971).
61. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/338/47/25 (1979–81).
62. Paert, 'Demystifying the Heavens', p. 218.
63. Author interview with Bihodzhal Rakhimova (October 2012).
64. Stone, 'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness', p. 312.
65. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/8/55-6 (1972).
66. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/8/56 (1972).
67. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/8/56 (1968–1972).
68. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/246/8/56 (1968–1972).
69. Stone, 'Overcoming Peasant Backwardness', p. 319.
70. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/338/11/69 (1973).
71. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/338/62/30 (1982–1985).
72. PAIPI TsIK KP RT 3/338/79/128 (1986).
73. Ibodat Rahimova, 'Spiritual Emancipation of Women', *Nauka i religiya*, no. 3, 1974, p. 6.
74. Rahimova, 'Spiritual Emancipation of Women', pp. 6–7.
75. Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 99.

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