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MUSLIM WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE TRANSMISSION OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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The historiography of the education of Muslim women in the Volga-Urals presents Jadid schools for girls as both a rupture from traditional female education and a triumph for women's liberation from the patriarchal backwardness which accounted for women's inferior and miserable position in society. The article suggests two important points. First, notwithstanding the Jadid claims about the backwardness and superstitious nature of the traditional female education, it fulfilled important functions within the community and could reach high levels of traditional scholarly knowledge. Muslim women were educated according to the criteria of traditional education and many of them were part of the high scholarly culture of the ulama. Second, the new Jadid education was built upon traditional female education, and many women masters (*abistays*) supported and made possible the transformation of education methods for girls.

Key words: *abistay*, religious authority, women's education, Jadidism.

Much of what we know about Volga-Ural Muslim women in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries is based on the Jadid or Muslim reformist writings – both fiction and non-fiction. Scholars have taken the Jadids' depiction of women at face value, accepted the paradigm of women's backwardness, ignorance and servility and praised the Jadids' efforts to improve women's educational and other rights. Traditional Islamic education and traditional women religious teachers were depicted as the main obstacles in the development of women's education and as a reason explaining women's ignorance and their perpetuated miserable condition. Echoing Jadid descriptions,

these scholars suggest that *abistays*' literacy was low, that the so-called "women's schools" situated at an imam's house were hardly suitable for women's education, that girls' education consisted of memorizing prayers in Arabic, which they hardly understood, and that Tatar women were highly superstitious. Such education is depicted as having had many drawbacks because girls were not exposed to secular sciences and their native language [1: 12, 2: 11, 3]. However, a closer look at the functioning of traditional education and the role of women masters (*abistays*) in the nineteenth century contradicts these suppositions. First of all, as Adeeb Khalid argued in his monograph *The Poli-*

tics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia, traditional education served a well-established purpose for the functioning of the Muslim society.¹ Secondly, modern transformations in the education of women at the beginning of the twentieth century were realized with the support, participation and protection of many traditional women teachers. Therefore, it is high time to move away from the Jadid paradigm and assess women's education and transmission of religious knowledge and authority in and of itself, rather than viewing it through the prism of Jadid thought.

Several ethnographers who travelled and worked in the Volga-Ural region in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries give us a glimpse into the traditional education of Muslim women, which is remarkably different from the bleak picture that the Jadids described. An ethnographer from the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Johann Gottlieb Georgi, who had visited the Volga region during his travel across Russia between 1770-1774, remarked that in every Tatar village there was a mosque and school and in bigger villages and towns there were also schools for girls [4: 82]. The 1897 census conducted all over Russia reveals that among the Tatar population of the Volga region the literacy rates of men and women were almost same: at 20% [5: 154]². Ethnographic studies on Tatars conducted by Karl Fuchs and Aristarkh Speranskii provide more surprising results. While emphasizing the equality of literacy rates of women and men, they noted that it was hard to find an illiterate Tatar girl in the region. According to Karl Fuchs (1776-1846), not only wealthy women, but even peasant women in the villages were literate, and reciting Qur'anic verses was their primary pleasure. Women among Kazan Tatars received an equal share of education. Fuchs also acknowledged that he saw beautifully written letters and texts of songs by female students [6: 49, 132, 7: 30, 8: 24].

An outstanding trait characterizing the Volga-Ural Muslim community was the presence of Muslim female teachers and religious authorities who played an active role in the transmission of knowledge among women. These female teachers were usually the wives of Muslim religious leaders, and they were called *abistay*. *Abiz* in the Volga-Urals is

derived from *hafiz*, which refers to a person who knows the Qur'an by heart, but in Volga-Ural context any person with some religious knowledge was called *abiz*, and knowledgeable women were called *abiiz-tütai/abistay* [9:232] or *ostaz-bikä/ostabikä* ('woman master'), which denoted "teacher".³ In Central Asian communities, as Marianne Kamp describes, historically there were similar female teachers who were known as *otins* (or *otinoi*). Similar to *abistays*, the *otins* were usually wives and daughters of religious scholars and they provided education and religious leadership to women [10].⁴

How can we explain the presence of these powerful and knowledgeable women in the Volga-Ural context? Indeed, it is important to underline here the presence of the Volga-Ural Muslim community in a non-Muslim state, which was historically often hostile to Muslim institutions and dignitaries. The emergence of Muslim women with deep

³ While information about *abistays*' religious authority is relatively scarce, two sources especially enrich our insight into the role of Muslim women in the transmission of religious knowledge. One of them - compiled by a prominent and respected religious scholar of the Volga-Ural Rizaeddin Fakhreddin - is *Asar* which is a famous compendium of biographies of the region's religious scholars. It often mentions the names of wives and daughters of the ulama and in, some cases, gives more extended information beyond their names. The second is the work about pre-revolutionary Tatar *maktabs* and *madrasas*, written by Kamal Salah and preserved in manuscript form in the Tatar language, which contains a section on female education. Kamal Salah (Kamalov Salah Kamalovich, 1884-1954) was the head of the Department of Oriental Manuscripts (today the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts) of Kazan State University's library. He wrote this work, called *Borıngı Tatar mäktäp vä mädräsäläre (Old Tatar maktabs and madrasas)*, in 1945-46 right after World War II when after the great repressions of the 1930s the government relaxed its policies towards religious institutions and servants and for the first time - right in the midst of the Great Patriotic War, in 1943 - allowed the official functioning of a number of Muslim mahallas and the ulama. This manuscript consists of five parts and totals 256 pages. One part of it is devoted to *abistays* and girls' education. The manuscript is preserved in the archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and History in Kazan, Fond 24, Opis' 1.

⁴ About *otins* see also Habiba Fathi "Otines: the Unknown Women Clerics of Central Asian Islam", Central Asian Survey, vol. 16, no. 1 (1997); for modern *otins*, see Svetlana Peshkova "Muslim Women Leaders in the Ferghana Valley: Whose Leadership Is It Anyway?" *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2009). (in English).

¹ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

² Being able to read in a language (not being able to write) was the criteria for the determination of literacy during the 1897 survey.

religious knowledge and the importance attached to them by the community are linked to the Russian imperial context where women would play an important role in the transmission of religious knowledge. Agn s Kefeli argued in her recent monograph that Tatar women were often more knowledgeable than their husbands [11: 141]. More often than not peasant Muslim women assumed full responsibility in the transmission of religious knowledge to children and other women. In the case of some Kriashen (baptized Tatars) communities, abıstays headed clandestine schools when their husbands were away. These abıstays played a crucial role in proselytizing among Muslim, Kriashen and animist women and reviving the faith of Muslims. Tatar women’s mobility and active stance helped to expand Islamic knowledge over a large territory, as many of them were true missionaries. As the bishop of Mamadysh in his speech at a missionary congress of June 1910 argued, “the Muslim success in proselytizing was to a great extent due to the contribution of Muslim women” [12:43].

A very similar situation can be observed in the Chinese Muslim community. As Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun have demonstrated, the rise of women imams in China can be explained by a context that developed under the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) when Uighur resistance to the Qing conquest became a source of constant friction and tension between Muslims and the government and often affected the relationship between Muslims and an increasingly hostile and suspicious government. Jaschok and Jingjun suggest that “in [the] face of political instability women found it important to assume responsibility to act as preservers of their religion.” Muslim religious scholars (*ahong*) in China taught many women religious knowledge, and men valued contributions of women in their dissemination of religious knowledge. Women’s fervor to acquire religious knowledge turned some of them into great scholars⁵.

Similar to the Chinese case, abıstays in the Volga-Ural region in the Russian empire established religious authority and would educate new generations of religious experts. Traditionally,

⁵ The title of *nu ahong* seems to appear in the mid-Qing dynasty and it applied also to other well-trained women qualified to set up women’s schools. Ahongs’ wives functioned as religious advisers for Muslim women. This context also shows the emergence of nusi or women’s mosques, which were initially part of the male mosque and later acquired an independent character. See: *The History of Women’s Mosques*.

abıstays provided ethical and religious education to girls in villages and *mahallas* (Muslim parishes). If an abıstay was the wife of a mulla, she was called mulla-abıstay, if she was the wife of a muezzin, she was called muezzin abıstay, if she was a wife of a lay person/peasant, which was more rare, she was known by her name – Jamil  abıstay, Fatiyma abıstay. Whereas every mosque had a school for boys, there was also an unofficial school for girls in the house of mulla where the girls gathered to study with an abıstay. Therefore, instead of “going to school” (*m kt pk *) they used to say, “we go to the lesson” or “we go to abıstay” (*sabaqqa y ki abıstaygha*) [13: 51]. In other words, while there was no formal institutional building of girls’ school in the Volga-Ural Muslim community, there was a well-established informal space for girls’ and women’s education which was a part of an imam’s house, known as *ash  e* or *qara  y* [13: 51], which can be roughly thought of as women’s quarter – a place where food was prepared and where the imam’s wife spent a lot of her time. As Allen Frank has suggested, despite the fact that women were absent from the formal Muslim institutions of mosque and madrasa, women did play an active role in Islamic education, and in nearly every mahalla girls got education similar to that of boys [14:224]. The sacredness of this space was specifically reflected in the fact that every such house was known in the community as a space where religious and ethical education of girls and women took place.

In the educational process, abıstays not only taught lessons but also prepared future female religious leaders. Usually, most of the girls in the neighborhood of the mahalla attended abıstay’s classes.⁶ Beyond basic education for all the girls, abıstays provided different levels of education, which depended on the talents and capacities of their students. Overall, the program for the education of girls was not very much different from that of a *maktab* [15]. For the education of girls, abıstays used the same books that were used in schools for boys: *Iman shartı*, *Yasin*, *H ftiy k*, *B d vam kitabı*, *Kisekbash yaki ahırzaman kitabı*, *Yarım alma kitabı*, *Fazail ash-shuhur kitabı*, *Yosif kitabı*, *Sh rhe Ghaziz  kitabı*, * stevani kitabı*, *Qur’an*, *Kirik hadis*, *Shurut as-salat*, and a few others [13:19]. Girls never attended schools for boys, but boys did study with abıstays, until they

⁶ According to Salah Kamal, around 20 to 30 percent of the girls could not attend classes for different reasons.

reached adolescence.⁷ Therefore, the educational and religious authority of abīstays also extended to boys. Most abīstays personally organized and managed the whole education of girls, but some abīstays resorted to the help of other women. Older girls also helped abīstays. In this way they also had an opportunity to practice teaching [13:54]. It was a habit in the girls' school to study with a *shārik* or a friend [13:56]. Kamp's observation about otins – that otins formed their own chains of knowledge transmission and that women's separation from men allowed for the creation of women's religious authority – is valid for the abīstays and Tatar community as well [10:77].

Despite the idea that girls' education was primitive and was confined to a few prayer books, more talented and eager-to-learn girls could always be exposed to more scholarly knowledge. While in Central Asia, "women's religious knowledge and authority could not compete with male authority" and "there are no accounts of women who attained degrees as religious scholars among Central Asians," there were several Muslim women who acquired profound religious knowledge in the Volga-Ural region [10: 77-78]. Indeed, as we will see below, in biographical works such as *Asar* and *Māshhūr Hatinnar*, several women are referred to as *alimas*, or religious scholars. Being daughters and wives of famous scholars, they had opportunities to study texts that were not normally covered in girls' maktab curriculum.

This is especially relevant to the knowledge of writing and languages. The record about women's ability to write is mixed. Salah Kamal suggests:

"although shari'a did not prohibit teaching girls writing, the ability to write was thought to spoil girls, as they might write letters to men. With this idea in mind, teaching girls how to write was almost considered a sin. So, there was no possibility to learn writing in girls' school, because most often abīstays did not know how to write and how to teach writing" [13: 56].

However, several biographies in *Asar* and *Māshhūr Hatinnar* show that women did practise writing especially by copying books, concise fiqh manuals and religious poetry and they even com-

posed their own treatises.⁸ There were also many abīstays who mastered Turkish, Arabic and Persian. One such example was a certain Maghdanul-jamal who was a daughter of the Sufi shaykh Fāizelhaq and the wife of the famous mudarris named Yaqub in Minzälä province. She learned how to write from her father and reportedly copied and edited *Tariqa-i Muhammadiyya* and *Mishkat al-Masabih*.⁹ She was reported to have beautiful handwriting. She knew Arabic and Persian and devoted all her life to educating the women folk.¹⁰ In his autobiography, a prominent Siberian scholar, Ghabderrāshit Ibrahim, wrote about his mother that in his native city of Tara she taught all the girls and women, which allowed her to support the family. It is thanks to his mother that all the women could read and write [16: 12-13].

Girls' education and transmission of knowledge among women was not confined to abīstays' classes and to the repetition of a lesson (*sabaq*). There were several opportunities and venues for an abīstay to teach and relay religious knowledge, as she was central to women's lives in the *mahalla*. She performed prayers at the request of women, read the Quran at various occasions and gave advice in different matters. Giving a sermon (*wāghaz*) would constitute an important part of an abīstay's religious authority. Fakhreddin mentions several women whose sermons were powerful and had a strong impact on people. This is how Fakhreddin describes Ghīyzenisa bint Ghabdelghafur bin Gadās (d. 1881), the wife of a licensed (*mānshūrle*) imam, mudarris and muhtasib of the village of Tüntär in Malmj region Ghali bin Säyfulla al-Tüntäri (d. 1874):

⁸ It is reported in the biography of Bädrelbanat, mother of Muhlisa Bubi that she copied all of her textbooks herself, which she used for teaching girls. Ghalimätelbanat is reported to have had a very literate (gramotniy) writing. Also see Kefeli where she notes that women liked to copy hymn (*mönäjät*) books.

⁹ *Mishkat al-Masabih* (English translation: *A Niche for Lamps*) is an expanded version of Al-Baghawi's *Masabih al-Sunnah* by Muammad ibn Abd Allāh Khatib Al-Tabrizi.

¹⁰ *Māshhūr Hatinnar*, pp. 377-378. Rizaeddin Fakhreddin mentions other women whose writing was beautiful and who even wrote their own treatises. Among them are Ghalimätelbanat bint Lotfulla, Zāynāb bint Shahimardan, Makhbubjamal bint Ähmäd, son of Hösäin Akchura. Mahiruy bint Ishaq is recorded for her beautiful writing and for studying Turkic, Persian and Arabic. Māwhibä bint Ramqul is recorded to have taught girls according to Turkic, Persian and Arabic books.

⁷ This would be even more remarkable during the Soviet period when many women would teach religious knowledge to boys and men. As Rashida Iskhāqiy told me in an interview, many men attended her home classes during the Soviet period when other venues of religious education hardly existed.

“Ghÿzzenisa is known to be diligent, courageous, and determinate. She was knowledgeable in Islamic and sharia sciences. She devoted her life to the education of girls and giving sermons (*wāghaz*) and advice (*nasÿyhät*) to women. Because she was very skillful at delivering sermons, she had a great impact on the formation of Muslim families in the village. Due to her strict and determinate character the students at Tüntär feared her more than the Shaykh, and the Shaykh himself praised her dedication and courageousness as a great support in overcoming difficulties. When the Shaykh was short in money, Ghÿzzenisa sold her jewelry and silver utensils to cover the expenses for the repair of the madrasa” [17: 18, 42].

When men went to the mosque for the Friday prayer, women of different ages gathered at the imam’s house. During these gatherings mulla abÿstay gave a sermon and read *Mohammädiyä*¹¹. A considerable part of girls’ education revolved around Sufi-inspired knowledge. In the girls’ schools especially, the textbooks written in the poetry form were preferred and loved. Kefeli demonstrated that Sufi poetry, rhymed prophetic stories, and religious hymns (*mönäjät*) constituted a popular part of religious learning. Reading Sufi poetry – individually and collectively – had special religious and practical functions at such meetings. These works played a crucial role in early childhood by forming children’s worldview, in spreading religious knowledge among peasant women and in women’s missionary activities [11]. In a girls’ maktab *Mohammädiyä* was one of the most favorite books and occupied an outstanding place. Both female students and their parents studied it with great love and pleasure; it was even “a sweet dream” (*tämle hÿyal*) for many students to study this book. In the villages the ability to read *Mohammädiyä* was considered a “big honor (*zur shäräf*) and great happiness (*zur bähät*)” [13: 57, 58]. Some skillful abÿstays read *Mohammädiyä* in choir together with their own students and asked the students to read it individually. As a result, on the one hand abÿstays ensured that this text entered and penetrated the souls of women; on the other hand, she ensured a sort of assessment of the girls

and demonstrated their knowledge (*bashkalarnÿn küzenä chaghildÿra*)” [13: 57, 58].

Women also played a crucial role in the traditional system of transmission of religious knowledge through marriage. An analysis of the biographies of ulama and Sufi leaders show that many of them were related through intermarriages. Many daughters of prominent shaykhs, imams and akhunds were married to members of the ulama. They were also mothers and wives of prominent shaykhs and imams, khatyps and mudarrises. *Asar* shows us very clearly that the networks of mullas and Sufi shaykhs often crisscrossed each other in a number of ways. Students and teachers and often a licensed imam could be a well-known shaykh (*ishan*), and intermarriage – as in the case of aforementioned Maghdanuljamal bint Fäizelhaq – made these networks ever tighter and weakened the distinctions between them. The daughter of a Sufi shaykh Fazlulla bin Fäyzulla became the wife of a famous licensed mudarris. Three of her sons became imams, one was akhund and one muezzin, and her two daughters married mullas. Hence the distinction between licensed scholars and Sufi shaykhs loses its significance, especially when a licensed imam is a Sufi authority at the same time. We can often see from *Asar* that many of the ulama who held a license were either famous for the Sufi shaykhly religious authority or were very often students of famous shaykhs.

Women were not simply connecting points between scholarly and shaykhly families, they were connecting points of scholarly and sufi knowledge – a knowledge which they then taught to their children and that was transmitted down to the following generations. Very often, in the scholarly literature, the Sufi knowledge is placed in juxtaposition to scholarly/legal knowledge. It is important to underline here that Muslim women reflected the unification and combination of these two types of knowledge. On the one hand, girls’ maktab programs did not differ from boys’ programs and texts. On the other hand, as Kefeli has suggested, “Female schooling was the next important step in establishing popular Sufi knowledge” [11: 140]. Knowledge of Arabic grammar and sharia and other scholarly texts was combined with the knowledge of Sufi ethics and upbringing (*tärbÿyä gÿylemnäre*). The biography below is illustrative of all these elements:

The wife of Shämseddin bin Rähmätulla (d. 1876), imam and mudarris of the village of Tüntär, Ghafifä bint Ghali (d. 1899) was the only daughter of the famous Sufi Shaykh and imam and mudarris

¹¹ *Mohämmädiyä* (Kitab-i Mustetab-i Muhammediya) was written in 1449 by Turkish writer Muhammed Celebi from Gelibolu. In Kazan it was first published in 1845, and before that it was used in manuscript form. Salah Kamal expresses his wonder about how this book entered the Tatar school and how it acquired such a great prominence in the Tatar community.

Ghali ishan. Shāmseddin was her father's murid. She mastered Arabic morphology and syntax (*sarf ve nahw*) as well as Persian under the supervision of her father. She was well educated in the sciences of ethics (*ahlaq*) and upbringing (*tārbiyā*). She followed Arabic and Persian journals and newspapers. She read the entire Qur'an having taken one lesson from her father. She devoted all her life to the education of girls and teaching and delivering sermons and giving advice to women [17].¹²

Thus, it was apparent that if an imam was the center of communal life in a mahalla, the abistay was no less a center for women and children, in both the transmission of religious knowledge and the organization of communal life. It's worth underlining here that family networks played an important role in women's education. Daughters of mullahs were encouraged to acquire knowledge because they were often given in marriage to mullahs. The family networking was an important feature of the Volga-Ural Muslim community. From the biographies of famous women of the region we learn that most if not all of them were born into the families of imams, received a profound education from their fathers and their mothers-abistays, married mullahs and became mothers of many religious scholars.

Rizaeddin Fakhreddin: re-defining the parameters for female religious authority

Rizaeddin Fakhreddin¹³ included many of these abistays in his *Māshhūr Hatinnar*.¹⁴ Rizaeddin

¹² Rizaeddin Fakhreddin noted in *Asar* that if he had known about her earlier, he would have included her in *Māshhūr Hatinnar*. He included her in the manuscript version of *Māshhūr Hatinnar*.

¹³ Rizaeddin Fakhreddin is an important religious scholar in the Volga-Ural Muslim community. Although historiography places him within the Jadid camp, it is an important question of where to place him. He stays at the intersection of traditional and modernist Islam; he was qadi at the OA in the last decade of the nineteenth century and was Mufti until his death in 1936.

¹⁴ *Māshhūr Hatinnar* is an important bibliographical dictionary in which Rizaeddin Fakhreddin collected biographies of famous Muslim women of the larger Muslim world. The first edition of this work was published in Orenburg in 1904 and contains only fourteen biographies of Russia's famous women. Its second edition is preserved in manuscript form in the archive of Ufimskii Nauchnii Tsentri of the Academy of Sciences. It dates May 3, 1934, and was never published for obvious reasons. The second edition is remarkable as it includes a considerably larger number of biographies of Russian Muslim women – thirty-eight in total. Fakhreddin also notes that while he was collecting biographies of the region's religious scholars, he was able to collect many

Fakhreddin attempts to define and redefine women's role in the society and who should be considered as religious authority among Tatar women. *Māshhūr Hatinnar* was an important manifestation of this effort, together with a large number of works about women that he published at the turn of the century. The remarkable thing about *Māshhūr Hatinnar* is that Fakhreddin places contemporary famous Tatar women into a larger Muslim context – one which covers the larger Muslim world and includes famous Muslim women who lived in different geographies and in different times, starting with the Prophet's wives. Fakhreddin devotes much attention to the Prophet's wives and close family, famous female hadith transmitters, preachers, calligraphers, female Sufi shaykhs, poetesses, theologians and jurists, rulers and healers. In this, for example, he is different from other Tatar Jadid intellectuals, such as the editors of *Söyembikä*, who discuss Tatar women and their status with reference to the Western world and Western women.

As a historian and a person who cared about creating a local history of religious scholars and institutions, another connection that Fakhreddin makes is to show the continuity in the history of famous Muslim women of Russia. He includes into his list of famous women authoritative female figures in the region's history, like the ruler of the late Kazan Khanate Söyembikä, daughter of Noghay Khan Timur and wife of the ruler of Kazan Khanate Ibrahim Nursoltan¹⁵ and the wife of the Kazan khan Ibrahim bin Mahmud Sufiya. There is a legendary figure Tuybikä, daughter of Aydar khan, the ruler of the city of Bulgar around 630. As a religious scholar, he devoted special attention to several daughters and wives of religious scholars and famous female religious authorities, such as daughter of Shihabeddin Märjani Ghaliya, wife of Ghalimjan Barudi Mahiruy bint Ishaq and others.

As a reformist-minded Jadid imam, Fakhreddin adds names of the first Muslim female doctor in Russia, Raziya Hanım (omitted from the second edition), the wife of Ismail Gasprinskii, Zöhrä Akchurina, and an author of several books on ethics

women's biographies from which he planned to produce a separate volume of famous women of "our region." In the concluding part, he underlines the role which Muslim women of Russia played in "preserving Islam in our country."

¹⁵ With Ibrahim, she had two sons Ghabdellatıf and Mohammädämin; both became khans. After her husband was deceased she married the Crimean Khan Miñlegäräy. During this marriage she became mother of Safagäräy khan.

of education and upbringing, Ghalimätelbanat Biktimeriya. Fakhreddin, therefore, makes important connections between the past and the present, bringing together political leaders, religious authorities and secular modernist activists among Volga-Ural Muslim women. He seems to praise women's socio-political active stance and demonstrates that Muslim women of the region were active leaders of their community and nation. He connects the fate of the nation (Russia's Muslim community) with religion, charity for religious institutions, and national and religious identities that were inseparable and unthinkable one without another. The inclusion of these women significantly shows his Jadid-minded approach toward history, religious authority, importance of women in this history and their presence in the fate of the Volga-Ural Muslim community.

There are several important features that display Fakhreddin's effort to re-set the parameters of women's religious authority, which to a large extent identifies him as a Jadid intellectual. One essential element of these biographies is Fakhreddin's inclusion of several women who were famous for their charitable acts in support of mosques, maktabas and madrasas. Muslim women not only taught girls and women, but also invested considerable amounts of their own money and property to Muslim educational institutions. Zöläyha, the wife of a big Muslim merchant in the city of Kizilyar (Petropavlovsk) Mohammädlatiyf bin Mohammädshäriif, donated forty thousand rubles to the Second mosque of Kizilyar [18: 208]. The expenses of Kazan's Eighth mosque were covered by the charitable fund of Zöbäydä, daughter of Musa bin Ismegiyibek from the famous Apanay family in Kazan and wife of Timurpolad bin Musa [18: 201]. Ghaishäbikä bint Muhammadsharif, the wife of a wealthy owner of several factories Ishaq Bay Utämishev and mother of Bibimahiruy, the wife of Ghalimjan Barudi, was famous for her endless charitable contributions.¹⁶

The second remarkable feature of these biographies is the recognition of women as *'ālīma* or female religious scholars, as well as the recognition of women's religious authority by male scholars and shaykhs, which is reflected in the fact that

¹⁶ She spent a lot of her property on the needs of maktabas and madrasas and on the support of the mosque in the village of Mächkärä and on the construction of infrastructure, such as bridges. Among other women, Fakhreddin includes Märyämbike, the daughter of the wealthy Muslim Timurpolad Akchurin, who opened a special orphanage for Muslim girls in the city of Ufa.

some women were granted *ijazas* or authorization from famous male religious authorities. Several women in *Mäshhür Hatinnar* are called *'ālīma* and are noted for receiving a profound religious education from their fathers and other male relatives who were religious scholars, for reading the Qur'an correctly, for their knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Turkic, for their beautiful handwriting and for knowledge of Islamic law.¹⁷ For example, Fakhreddin writes about a daughter of a Siberian mudarris Ghismätulla al-Tümäni Hanifä hanım who studied the sciences of Arabic morphology (*sarf*), syntax (*nahw*), logic (*mantiq*), and the science of discourse (*ilm-i kalam*) with her father. With her own dedication and determination, she attained perfection in these subjects. Fakhreddin underlines the fact that that she was the first Muslim woman [in the Russian Empire] who published her works. Several prominent ulama such as Sayyid Mohamäd Ghali al-Zahir al-Vitri, Shaykh Zäynullah al-Halidi, Ghalimjan Barudi recognized her erudition in religious sciences and gave her *ijaza*. After the death of her husband, she devoted her life to learning and teaching.¹⁸ Another such *'ālīma* was Sadıqa, daughter of imam Säyfäddin bin Subhanqul from the village of Kichüchät in Bögelmä province and wife of imam in Älmät province Habibrahman. Fakhreddin tells us that she was "in contact with many prominent scholars and Sufi shaykhs who gave her *ijazas* to read several prayer books" (*aurad ve ahzab shäriifä ukir öchen ijazate bar ide*). Her father sought her advice in important decisions [18: 272]. Therefore, we can deduce that giving *ijazas* to women and recognizing their scholarly authority was a part of Muslim tradition in the Volga-Ural region. These biographies especially show the importance and centrality that Fakhreddin attributes to traditional female education and women's knowledge and authority in religious sciences.

Thirdly, he includes women whose education combined religious and secular knowledge, and who were famous for writing their own works. We learn from him that, Mahiruy Barudiya (born in 1862) who was born to a wealthy family, received her early education at Ghaysha abıstay's lessons – granddaughter of Sufi shaykh Ghabdelhalik, brother of the prominent religious scholar of the region, Ghabdennasir Qursawi. She studied Turkic, Persian and Arabic. She learned how to read the

¹⁷ See especially biographies of Maghdanuljamal, the daughter of shaykh Fazlulla, Mäwhibä bint Ramqul, Bädrelbanat, the mother of Muhlisä Bubi.

¹⁸ *Mäshhür Hatinnar*, p. 149.

Quran with *tajwid* (correctly) and how to write from this ishan who received education in Cairo. Later, she would read all Turkic-language books that she laid her hands on. She thus received a profound religious and secular education. She later continued to study from her husband, a prominent scholar of the region Ghalimjan Barudi. Another such woman, Ghalimätelbanat bint Lotfulla (born in 1876), daughter of an imam and wife of an imam, would become a famous woman who composed her own treatises. She received her early education from her father, learned Arabic and became interested in and mastered oriental literature. She also studied Russian by herself, and expressed curiosity in mathematics and geography. In 1895, after marrying, she moved to the village of Yaubash close to the city of Kasiym, opened a school for girls and began to teach there. At the same time, she began to compose her own writing and between 1892 and 1903 produced a number of books and booklets – *Tärgiyb al-banat*, *Husne al-wasiyat*, *Mogashärät adabe* (*Good Manners*) [19]. Fakhreddin especially praises her writing skills in her biography. Her writing was impeccable, and she used the language very well. Her book *Good Manners* is noted to be a very nice and useful book [18: 289].¹⁹

Fourth, and most important, Fakhreddin wants us to know that many of these women invested their effort, knowledge and wealth in girls' education by opening and organizing the educational process and by teaching at maktabas for girls. Most of them had already devoted their lives to teaching girls and women of their neighborhoods at their homes. Yet, as a proponent of new-method education, Rizaeddin Fakhreddin purposefully mentions several women who opened new-method schools for girls – schools that provided a different type of education, the discussion of which will be the subject of the next section.

The women's biographies allow us to trace the ideal of Rizaeddin Fakhreddin and his attempt to set the wider parameters of authoritative women in the community. They were not only religious authorities among women; famous male religious scholars and shaykhs also recognized their reli-

gious authority. They cared for the religious institutions of their community and tried to invest in different ways – they gave of their property to charity; they acquired contemporary knowledge in addition to religious texts; they wrote socially important works, and opened schools. Opening schools for girls and a gradual shift from an abistay's house to an institutional space of the school became an important feature of women's education and transmission of knowledge after 1905. Fakhreddin's effort was a part of the Jadid program to elevate women's status in the society and family, and giving them education was the practical implementation of this program. Yet, it is important to note that traditional knowledge and education constituted the basis of a suitable knowledge for women, and Fakhreddin's ideal of an authoritative woman was deeply rooted in the traditional society. This is especially seen in his attempt to redefine the parameters of a suitable knowledge for women.

Rizaeddin Fakhreddin, “appropriate” knowledge and Jadid schools for girls

Rizaeddin Fakhreddin's writings reflected the concerns of many reformist-minded intellectuals – both in Russia and abroad – about the proper features of female education, as they were connected to larger goals of improving women's status in the private and public spheres. This section seeks to problematize the Jadids' attitude toward female education and show that it was more nuanced than is usually acknowledged. While Jadid female education is often portrayed as a triumph of secular education that allowed for the emergence of women engineers, doctors and graduates of prestigious universities, many Jadids and Jadid ulama in particular had other motives in improving education for girls. Marianne Kamp has suggested that “Jadids tried to replace the otin, associated with rote learning and superstition, with the muallima, or woman teacher who was trained in modern educational theories” [10: 77]. It is true that many Jadids, especially the second generation, began to support purely secular education of women and women's achievements in science, medicine and other secular sciences.²⁰ However, for many of them, especially for the Jadids of the first generation and Jadid ulama, women's knowledge and education was subordinated to the goal of making

¹⁹ Also, in the above-mentioned biography of Ghafifä Tüntäri, she not only received a profound religious education from her father, imam-mudarris and famous shaykh Ghali ishan, but was following Arabic and Persian journals. She subscribed to the newspaper *Nil* published in Cairo and *Yoldiz* published in Istanbul and read every issue. She borrowed many books from her father's library to read.

²⁰ This is especially an ideal propagated by editors and contributors of *Söyembikä*, where they often included articles praising Western and Russian women's study in Russian colleges and universities and acquiring modern professions of agronomists, engineers, doctors, etc.

women better mothers and wives, not of producing women engineers and doctors for the society, and abīstays played an important role in popularizing the new type of knowledge.

This goal was very similar to the goals of Muslim reformists in the larger Muslim world. As Gail Minault showed in the Indian context, the leaders of “the generation of reform” – which she defines as “the post-1857 generation, whose education was a mixture of Islamic and Western, who became skilled religious and social controversialists and who first founded associations and schools for the education of women and published books and magazines for the edification of women in purdah” [20:11] – “the goal of the men involved in the movement for women's education was to create women who would be better wives, better mothers and better Muslims. These men of the newly-emergent professional and middle classes desired wives who were better companions to their husbands, better managers of households in the face of uncertain economic forces, better mothers who would raise their children to be healthy and disciplined and Muslims who knew the tenets of their faith as contained in the scriptures, rather than in customary rituals.” [20: 215].

Similar to Indian Muslim reformers, Rizaeddin Fakhreddin asked in his work *Ghailā* “what kind of knowledge should a woman acquire?” Like many of them, and many other Volga-Ural reformist-minded ulama and secular intellectuals, he asked:

“Is it necessary that women are knowledgeable and educated? I think, no one, no Muslim will deny this. If mothers were ignorant, who would teach [new generations] the love of knowledge, ethical and moral lessons – the things that every believer should know. Even if fathers are more or less knowledgeable, they won't have time and energy to raise children. As for schoolteachers, even if they teach how to read and write, they won't be able to teach those things related to personality (*tabighat wā holiq*) that mothers would teach. Therefore, the biggest task at raising and educating children lies on mothers. How would an ignorant woman know how to educate their children in a way that shari‘a orders us to do? Therefore, women need to be educated. But what kind of knowledge should a woman acquire? If we say that it should be knowledge, which a woman needs to be a mother and a wife, we won't probably be wrong” [21: 21-22].

He then proceeded to give a detailed explanation of what kind of knowledge a woman would ideally acquire in the contemporary world. For Rizaeddin Fakhreddin, women had to study religion

(*din*), ethics (*ahlaq*), and manners (*haliq belān aralashu adābe*) before studying logic, Muslim scholastic theology (*kalam*), philosophy, foreign languages and their grammar and syntax. A real knowledge of religion would be the foundation for a strong character, good nature and happiness in the family. The second set of necessary knowledge was home crafts (*hōnār*)²¹, reading and writing, home management and family management. Educating children by means of religion was the primary type of upbringing [21: 22-23].

After these two sets of knowledge – religion and crafts – Fakhreddin speaks about the importance of general knowledge. Reading and writing constituted an important part of it. According to Fakhreddin, a woman who knows how to read and write would read all sorts of useful articles, get familiar with geography, history and literature. In the absence of her husband, she would not ask a stranger to write letters on her behalf or would not have to ask someone to read the letters she received. With this type of knowledge, a woman would be dignified to listen to the words of great scholars and would be able to say her own opinion as well. More than that, a woman would be equal to her husband in knowledge, and thus would be a good companion to her husband. Lastly, Fakhreddin underlined the importance of medical knowledge in order to care for one's health and care for sick people. According to him, if a woman had an opportunity to study this type of knowledge, it would be very useful for mothers and wives. After all, women were better at taking care of the sick people than men. If a woman knew healthcare rules, she would be of great help to her own children and to other people and, with a kind nature and behavior, would be able to render better service than doctors could do [21: 24-25].

As we can see from Fakhreddin's views about women's education, the primary type of knowledge that any woman was supposed to have was knowledge of religion and ethics, followed by knowledge of home and family management, and basic secular knowledge. While the first and the second sets of knowledge were often a part of

²¹ One of the most important things for women to learn was *hōnār* – how to cook, how to sew clothes and make hand crafts – which was perfection for women. With these skills, a family would always be safe from poverty. If a woman's husband was deceased, she and her children would not be left in the street. If a woman knew multiple crafts, the wealth of the family would not be spent for nothing. A man would not look for a stranger to cut, sew or patch something.

abīstay’s lessons, the third set of knowledge was rather new. Thus, Fakhreddin redefines female education to create a multifaceted personality, a woman who would also be a companion to her husband, would be knowledgeable about contemporary affairs, would read books on different topics, would be able to write letters and know multiple crafts. This was exactly the combination of knowledge that many reformist schools for girls would adopt. Yet, we should underline that for Fakhreddin and for other reformist-minded ulama, a woman was primarily an educator of new generations and religious knowledge was something that constituted the basis of a well-educated woman (*tārbiyāle hatīn*) and well-brought up children (*tārbiyāle bala*) – the subject of two other of Fakhreddin’s books.

Many Jadid ulama and secular intellectuals expressed views on reforming women’s state of affairs similar to those of Fakhreddin. Women’s education for them was to an extent a panacea for the ills and backwardness of the society as well as the prosperous future of the community. Women were the educators of the new generation. Reformers linked the future destiny and prosperity of the nation to the progress in women’s status and education. They thought that educated mothers and wives would be better companions to their husbands and be able to raise their children intelligently, making their children both pious and intelligent, caring for their community and striving to develop it in various ways.

The problem in this formulation was the assumption that the women had not been receiving a useful education and therefore the new education that the Jadids proposed would be radically different from the traditional education. Although this assumption prevails in the historiography on education reform among the Muslims of Russia, it neglects the fact that the new education for girls was built on the traditional authority of abīstays who had been educating girls in the Muslim society. Many traditional abīstays often supported their reformist husbands and sons, and became the first educators in girls’ reformed makhtabs.

One such supporter of the new-method Jadid schools for girls was Bādrelbanat Bubi, the mother of famous Jadid ulama Ghobāydulla and Ghabdulla Bubis, and Muhlisa Bubi. Bādrelbanat Bubi supported the opening of the first classes for girls within the Ij-Bubi educational complex in 1906-07. The emergence of this reformed school dates back to 1895, when two religious scholars – Ghabdulla, who had just received his license (*ukaz*) and was

officially appointed as imam to the village of Bubi, and Ghobāydulla who had just returned back from completing his higher education in Istanbul – established a reformed Jadid school for boys. In 1907, Ghabdulla and Ghobāydulla Bubis decided to open a separate school for girls, thereby creating the first jadid female school and setting an example for other similar schools. According to the recollections of Ghabdulla Bubi, the school was not easily accepted. People were hesitant to send their daughters, especially due to the continuous criticism of several mullas in the village and the region. The help and much needed support came from the mother of two brothers, who was a respected abīstay. Bādrelbanat was the daughter of imam-mudarris Imanqul bin Māhmūt from the village of Chebenle and abīstay Hubbijamal, known for her mastery of teaching and writing. In the words of her own son Ghabdulla Bubi, who left an important memoir of the history of Ij-Bubi madrasa, Bādrelbanat was an *‘ālima* – a title that was usually reserved for men. She was a well-educated and very knowledgeable woman and knew Arabic and Persian very well, which she learned from her parents. She taught all the girls in the neighborhood. She also taught Arabic and Persian to some girls as well as her daughter, Muhlisa. As there were no printed books at that time, she copied all the books by herself and used them in her teaching. Bādrelbanat was an honored individual, followed the principles of shari‘a scrupulously, was diligent in performing prayers. She had a nice and clear voice and during women’s gatherings read the Qur’an beautifully [22: 41]. Her religious authority was the main reference to defend the appropriateness of the new school for the girls and the new program of education. Ghabdulla Bubi notes the importance of his support as such:

“Since our mother was an open-minded woman, she did not object to our presence in the girls’ school and our efforts to reform it; on the contrary, she supported us. Her support was vital for our work, because, as a well-known old and pious abīstay she enjoyed the respect of the common people and the mullas of the region, who considered her to be a saint. We would respond to the criticism of people by saying that “our mother is supervising what we are doing (*ānkāy bar eshebezneñ östendä bit*) she wouldn’t let us do anything that is contrary to shari‘a. Thanks to her support there were very few people who opposed when we included the Russian language in the curriculum of the girls’ school” [22: 32, 41, 42].

In 1906, the Bubi family opened the first three classes and composed a curriculum for secondary school level for girls' education (*kızlar rōshdiyāse*) which included Arabic, Ethics, Mathematics, Turkic grammar and writing, Persian, Geography, History, Hygiene, Zoology, Botany, child rearing, home management, needle work and Russian. In 1907, they have added three higher levels of (further) education and added Logic (*Mantiq*), Fiqh, Usul al-fiqh, Religious Doctrines (Ghaqid), Algebra, Geometry, Science of Nature, Chemistry, Language eloquence (*Belaghat-e tōrkiyya*), Geology (*Tabakat*), and Biology (*Hayat*). As we can observe, this was a combination of religious sciences, languages, lessons on home management and modern subjects [22: 41-43]. Since there were no women, who could teach these subjects, brothers Ghabdulla and Gobāydulla taught their sister Muhlisa, who would become the head of school and a qadi at the Orenburg Mukhammadan Spiritual Assmsembly, and their wives in the evening, and the women taught new lessons the next day during daytime [22: 42-43]. Muhlisa Bubi's personality reflects exactly the type of individual who was deeply rooted in traditional Islamic education and who also had a modern education. She stood at the intersection of the two types of knowledge and education and her well-versed education in the religious tradition led her throughout her life. Muhlisa's educational formation was well rooted in the traditional scholarly family and traditional female education. Muhlisa Bubi's life evolved within and around this traditional education network of women and men. Muhlisa Bubi learned the basics of Islam and reading the Qur'an from her mother. While being the head of the girls' school and teaching there, Muhlisa also began to study theological and religious subjects of the madrasa program for boys under the guidance of her brothers. People called her mulla-abistay, which signified her reputation as a religious scholar, theologian and expert in Islamic law [2: 162]. When the Ij-Bubi madrasa school was closed, she became a teacher of religious subjects at another girls' school in Troitsk and, during the 1920s, she continued to write in *Islam Mājälläse* about the importance of Islamic upbringing and religious education within a general education of the new generation. She pointed to the primary roles of women in the transmission of religious knowledge and in their effort to preserve religion and morality under the tsarist regime when the latter "often resorted to suppressing religious institutions and russification" [23:28]. She received ijaza from one of the most

respected scholars Ghalimjan Barudi and her election as a qadi shows that at least a part of the Volga-Ural Muslim community recognized her as alima.

It is important to underline that Bubi's school for girls was not the only new-method female school. Kamal Salah suggests that before the 1917 revolution most of the boys' maktabs turned into jadid schools and about fifty percent of girls began to study in reformed girls' schools [13: 220]. While this seems to be an exaggeration, there were several other girls' schools similar to Ij-Bubi school. Several mulla and abistay families followed the example set by the Bubi family and the role of Bedrelbenat abistay in the promotion of the new method school for girls. Abistays played an active role in propagating and supporting the new type of education.

One of such schools was the school of Mahiruy abistay, headed by Bibimahiruy abistay Barudi, the wife of a prominent religious scholar Ghalimjan Barudi. Bibimahiruy received religious education from Ghayshā abistay, granddaughter of a famous Sufi shaykh Ghabdelhalik ishan. Her school acquired prominence in the city of Kazan. She used to keep the most successful girls as her assistants and prepared them to teach as *muallimas* [24: 215]. Among other famous schools for girls there was the school of Ghalimatelbanat, daughter of the imam in the village of Kutaymaz (Tsarevokakshaiskii township) and wife of the imam in the village of Yaubash of Riazan province; the school of imam Sädretdin bin Säyfetdin and his wife Māwudā abistay [1: 49]; the school of Fatīyma abistay, the wife of the imam of the village of Aghrīz in Sarapul township of Viatka province; imam Mohammāt Ghata häzrāt Mansurov's school, for which he invited a muallima [25: 17];²² and the school of Zāynāb abistay (the mother of Ahmet Temir, a famous Tatar émigré scholar) in Älmät.²³ All of these schools provided a combination of religious and secular subjects and abistays ran them and taught in them.

Conclusion

Traditional female education was not superstitious and irrelevant, as the Jadids described. On the contrary, Muslim girls acquired an education that was purposeful for their roles in the Muslim society and some of them were even able to receive a

²² Yoldiz, Yanvar (1916).

²³ Ahmet Temir recalls how Zāynāb abistay was the "queen of Älmät" and provided religious, (sihhi) and all sorts of important (hayati konularda) knowledge to Älmät women. Everyone in Älmät respected her a lot.

higher level of education and participate in the high scholarly culture of the ulama through family networks and thanks to their training by male and female religious authorities. Secondly, the traditional female education and traditional female religious authority constituted the basis on which new education was built. It is important to underline that we should not see the first jadid schools for girls as a complete rupture from previous traditional transmission of knowledge. They offered a combination of traditional and modern knowledge. It was abıstays who initiated, supported and taught in those schools, and their religious authority was important in popularizing girls' maktabs.

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РОССИЯ ИМПЕРИЯСЕНЕҢ СОҢГЫ ЧОРЫНДА МӨСЕЛМАН ХАТЫН-КЫЗЛАРЫНЫҢ ДИНИ АБРУЕ ҺӘМ ИСЛАМ ГЫЙЛЕМЕН ТАРАТУДАГЫ РОЛЕ

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Идел-Урал буенда яшәгән мөселман хатын-кызлары мәгарифен өйрәнүче тарих фәннәдә кызлар жәдиди мәктәпләрендә белем бирү хатын-кызларны укуының традицион формаларыннан аерылу һәм жәмгыятьтә түбән һәм кызганыч хәленең сәбәбе булган искелек калдыкларыннан хатын-кызны азат итү казанышы буларак характерлана. Мәкаләдә ике тәғлимат алга куела. Беренчесе: жәдитчеләрнең традицион хатын-кызлар белеменең артталыгын һәм искелеген раслауларына карамастан, ул жәмгыятьтә мөһим функция башкарган һәм югары традицион фәнни белемгә ия булу мөмкинлеге биргән. Мөселман хатын-кызлар традицион белем критерийларына туры килгән белем алган һәм аларның күбесе голәмәләр югары фәнни мәдәниятенә мөһим өлешен тәшкил иткәннәр. Икенчесе: яна жәдитчелек белеме традицион хатын-кыз белеменә нигезләнгән, һәм күп кенә хатын-кызлар, үз эшенең осталары булган абыстайлар, кызларга белем бирү методикасын яклап, үзгәрешләр керткәннәр.

Төп төшенчәләр: абыстай, дини абруй, хатын-кыз белеме, жәдитчелек.

РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ АВТОРИТЕТ МУСУЛЬМАНСКИХ ЖЕНЩИН И ИХ РОЛЬ В СИСТЕМЕ МУСУЛЬМАНСКОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ПОЗДНЕИМПЕРСКОЙ РОССИИ

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Историография образования женщин-мусульманок Волжско-Уральского региона характеризует обучение в джадидских школах для девочек как отрыв от традиционного женского образования и освобождение от патриархальной отсталости, которая была причиной приниженого и жалкого положения женщины в обществе. В статье выдвигаются два важных положения. Первое: несмотря на утверждения джадидов об отсталом и полном предубеждений традиционном женском образовании, последнее выполняло в сообществе важную функцию и могло достигать высокого уровня традиционного научного знания. Женщины-мусульманки получали образование в соответствии с критериями традиционного образования, и многие из них были частью высокой научной культуры улемы. Второе: новоджадидское образование основывалось на традиционном женском образовании, и многие женщины, мастера своего дела (абыстай), поддерживали и претворяли в жизнь изменения в методике обучения девочек.

Ключевые слова: абыстай, религиозный авторитет, женское образование, джадизм.