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Muslim Female Religious Authority in Russia: How Mukhlisa Bubi Became the First Female *Qāḍī* in the Modern Muslim World

Rozaliya Garipova
Kennan Institute, Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.
rozaliya77@yahoo.com

Abstract

On 11 May 1917, the participants of the All-Russia Muslim Congress elected a woman, Mukhlisa Bubi, as a *qāḍī* (a Muslim judge) to the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia. Granting legal authority to a woman at a central religious institution was unprecedented in the Muslim world. This article explores how this election was possible in Russia and suggests that it was the outcome of several factors. First, Muslim women of the Volga-Ural region already occupied a well-established place in traditional Muslim education, and many women were part of the Islamic scholarly culture. Second, modernist (Jadīd) religious scholars and intellectuals had brought up the issue of women education and female schooling, and supported the formation of a network of young women who made new claims about women's education, rights, and active public stance in serving the nation. Among these were Bubi's brothers. Third, the Russian revolutionary atmosphere worked as a catalyst for promoting the claims of women activists and provided the Jadīds the opportunity to take over the authority at the Central Spiritual Administration. Finally, Mukhlisa's election seems to be a compromise between conservative and feminist/liberal groups in the society, and seems to have therefore been acceptable to most male congress delegates.

Keywords

Muslim modernism (Jadidism) – women's education – reformist madrasa – Mukhlisa Bubi (Mukhliṣa Būbī) – legal authority – *abïstay*

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On 11 May 1917, just a couple of weeks after the abdication of Nikolai II, the participants of the All-Russia Muslim Congress elected a woman, Mukhlisa Bubi (Mukhlişa Būbī) , as a *qāḍī*[1] (a Muslim judge) to the Central Spiritual Administration. This was a unique event not only in the history of Russia's Muslims but also in the whole modern Muslim world.[2] Approximately nine hundred Muslim delegates from different regions of the Russian Empire participated in the Congress of 1-12 May 1917, representing all social, intellectual, and political trends, with Muslim modernists constituting the majority of the delegates.[3] For the first time, 112 Muslim women also participated in a political congress as delegates. These women proposed reforms to women's political, social, and marital rights, reforms that a special Muslim Women's Congress had formulated a month earlier; and the issue of women's rights became one of the most fiercely debated issues at the congress.[4]

The main concern of the congress was, however, not the women question; rather, the central issue was whether Muslims should strive for cultural or territorial autonomy in the future political structure of Russia. Regardless of their political and intellectual stances, all delegates agreed that *sharīʿa* and Muslim identity, which differentiated Muslim populations from the Christian population of Russia, must constitute the foundation of any kind of autonomy.[5] The congress decided to transform the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly, the main institution that had represented Muslims in the Russian Empire, into a modernized Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia. They made the position of *muftī* subject to elections instead of direct

1 For Arabic terms and concepts, I use Arabic transliteration. For words written in Tatar with Arabic script I use Arabic transliteration with the addition of some vowels and consonants that exist in the Tatar language. I follow Tatar phonetic transliteration for words written in Tatar with Cyrillic alphabet.

2 Female judges, whose jurisdiction was limited to family law, were appointed in 1964 in Indonesia, in 2009 in the Palestinian territories, and in 2010 in Malaysia. Ilene R. Prusher, "New female judge transforms Islamic court", *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 13, 2009 <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/0513/p06s20-wome.html>; Daniel Lev, *Islamic Courts in Indonesia* (Berkley, University of California Press, 1972), 110; Vaudine England "Malaysian Groups Welcome First Islamic Women Judges", BBC <http://www.bbc.com/news/10567857>.

3 İhsan Ilgar, *Rusya'da Birinci Müslüman Kongresi Tutanakları* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları 1990); "'Umūmī möselmān isyezdï ḥaqïnda ijmālī ḥisāb", *Mä'lūmāt* 8-9 (1917), 5.

4 Şengül Hablemitoğlu and Necip Hablemitoğlu, *Şefika Gaspıralı ve Rusya'da Türk Kadını Hareketi (1893-1920)* (Ankara: AJANS-TURK, 1998), 163.

5 Marianne Kamp, "Debating Sharia: The 1917 Muslim Women's Congress in Russia", *Journal of Women's History* 27.4 (2016), 15, 29.

appointment by the Tsar.[6] Also elected, for the first time, were six *qāḍī*s. In the Administration, *muftī* and *qāḍī*s represented a collegiate body. They gathered regularly to hear, discuss, and decide on requests of Muslims to construct new mosques and establish new *maḥalla*s. They also assessed the qualifications of candidates for official religious positions, who had been nominated by *maḥalla* communities. They also responded to petitions (*ʿarḍ*) on family and inheritance disputes, reassigned cases to local *ākhūnd*s and *imām*s for further investigation if needed, and controlled the resolution of these cases.

For one of these *qāḍī* positions the assembly elected Mukhlisa Bubi – in absentia, for she was not even present at the congress. By May 1917, Mukhlisa was already a well-known and respected woman of religious authority. In 1897 she and her brothers had set up the first girls' madrasa, in Ij-Bubi, a Tatar village in present-day Tatarstan, Agryz district. This school provided new-method (*uṣūl-i jadīd*) education to girls of all ages, and trained female teachers. After the government closed the school in 1911, under the pretext that it was a hotbed of Pan-Turkist and Pan-Islamist activities, Mukhlisa was invited to teach at another girls' madrasa, in Troitsk, where she worked as the principal and a teacher from 1911 to 1917.

After her election to the office of *qāḍī* in May 1917, Mukhlisa Bubi directed the newly established Family Department within the Central Spiritual Administration, which dealt with issues of divorce, dower (*mahr*), marital consent, inheritance, and other legal complaints of women. On subsequent All-Russian Muslim congresses in 1923 and 1926 she was reelected to this position. In the meantime, she continued to write in *Islām mäjälläse*, the Administration's Tatar-language journal, on legal and social issues concerning Muslim women. Beginning in the late 1920s, the Bolsheviks started their full-blown repression of Islam in the USSR, and closed almost all mosques and Muslim schools. Like so many other Tatar Muslim activists, intellectuals, and religious scholars, Mukhlisa was accused of being a member of an anti-Soviet bourgeois-nationalist organization, and was executed in 1937. Around that time the Central Spiritual Administration practically ceased operating.[7]

6 The Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (*Mäḥkämä-i shärʿiyya*) was administered by a collegiate body of *muftī* and three *qāḍī*s and functioned as an Islamic court of appeal. For the analysis of the Islamic legal transformation in nineteenth-century Russia, see Rozaliya Garipova, "Did the *Ākhūnd*s Disappear? Islamic Legal Experts and the Breakdown of the Traditional Islamic Legal Order in the Russian Empire", *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law* (forthcoming in June, 2017).

7 Despite the rumors about the closure of the Central Spiritual Administration in 1937 and 1938, it remained open and, after the death of Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov (Riḍā al-Dīn bin Fakhr al-Dīn) in 1936, was headed by Gabdrakhman (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) Rasulev. The activity of the

This article analyzes the conditions that made possible Mukhlisa Bubi's election as the first woman *qāḍī* in the Russian empire. I argue that Mukhlisa's election was the result of a dynamic relationship between tradition, Muslim modernism, and revolution in the Russian empire. First, female teachers (*abïstay*s) had always played an important role in Tatar communities, where they organized traditional female education and participated in the scholarly network of men. *Abïstay*s taught basic Islamic knowledge to womenfolk in Muslim communities, but they also provided talented girls with a more profound education. Next to Mukhlisa Bubi, in the early twentieth century other famous *abïstay*s also established schools for girls, most of them integrating elements of the Jadīd education that unfolded at that time (including standardized school curricula, a modernized pedagogy especially in teaching reading and writing, and nonreligious subjects not taught at traditional schools).[8]

Second, new-method madrasas for girls created a forum for both students and teachers to make new claims about the need to encompass modern education for girls to enhance the Muslim women's contribution to the service of the nation, however the latter was defined. These women could reach out beyond their small local groups by mobilizing female youth across the region. The spread of Jadidist ideals about women's education, enlightened motherhood, and service to the community (or nation, both embodied in the concept of *millät*) played an important role in the emergence of a group of women with a similar world view. Jadīds called on men to support women in their acquisition of modern secular education, so that the latter could become better mothers

Central Spiritual Administration was revived in 1941 when the "Great Patriotic War" (World War II) broke out and the Soviet government sought the help of Rasulev in mobilizing Muslims for the war. After that the Central Spiritual Administration remained a tightly controlled instrument of the Soviet state and still exists today, next to many other Muftiates that emerged in Russia in the 1990s. Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: from the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 102-05; S.G. Rakhmankulova, *Muftii Gabdrakhman Rasulev – starshii syn Ishan Khazrata Rasuleva* (Cheliabinsk, 2000), 111-16.

8 On Jadidism, see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Damir M. Iskhakov, *Fenomen tatarskogo dzhadidizma: vvedenie k sotsiokul'turnomu osmysleniiu* (Kazan, 1997); Aidar Iuzeev "Mesto dzhadidizma v tatarskoi obshchestvennoi mysli kontsa 19go - nachala 20go vekov", *Ekho Vekov*, 1-2, 1999; Christian Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus im Russischen Reich: Nationsbildung and Nationalbewegung bei Tataren and Baschkiren, 1861-1917* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000); Ahmet Kanlidere, *Reform within Islam - The 'Tajdid' and 'Jadid' Movement among the Kazan Tatars (1809-1917): Conciliation or Conflict?* (Istanbul: EREN, 1997); Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims: Islam, Empire and European Modernity, 1788-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); James Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856-1914* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

in raising the new generation and serve as teachers and doctors. Mukhlisa herself hailed from a family of devoted Jadīd teachers.

Third, the 1917 February Revolution was crucial in the election of Mukhlisa to office. The revolutionary atmosphere allowed female Muslim activists to mobilize and push for equal rights. These activists faced little opposition to their demands for political equality and for universal suffrage as these rights had been granted to women in Russia in the aftermath of the February Revolution. They freely convened congresses, and in several towns Muslim women demanded to join Muslim political organizations. They even received a *fatwā* from *ʿulamāʾ* in Troitsk declaring that *sharīʿa* allowed women to assume political office.[9] The 1917 February Revolution allowed the Jadīds to sideline the conservative *ʿulamāʾ* who opposed educational innovation. With the demise of the Tsarist regime, the conservatives lost ground also in the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Administration, and the Jadīds had gained control of the institution by 1917. Jadīds numbers might be exaggerated in most of the research literature, but they clearly dominated the public discourse, not the least through their newspapers and journals. The 1917 Revolution created favourable conditions for Jadīds to seize power from their conservative counterparts, and to elect reformist-minded members to the Religious Administration, including a female *qāḍī*.

In the revolutionary atmosphere, the Muslim Congress supported the demands for women's social and political equality, including their enfranchisement. However, to maintain the Muslim community's unity, the modernists wanted to avoid alienating the conservative *ʿulamāʾ*. Therefore, the congress did not embrace the more radical demands of some women delegates, such as complete equality within the family (including in matters of divorce and inheritance) and the abolition of polygyny. Neither did the congress support the candidacy of women with secular education to the post of *qāḍī*. In this light, Mukhlisa appears as a compromise candidate: she was not a radical reformist but a modest woman of the middle ground. It is this factor that made her candidacy most appropriate for both liberal and conservative forces.

The Tatar Tradition of Educating Girls

The presence of a well-developed and widespread network of female Muslim teachers and religious authorities who played an active role in transmitting

9 Sagit Faizov, *Dvizhenie musul'manok Rossii za prava zhenshchin v 1917 gg.: stranitsy istorii* (Nizhnyi Novgorod: Makhinur, 2005), 23.

knowledge among women is an outstanding trait of the Volga-Ural Muslim community.[10] As Allen Frank has suggested, even though women were absent from the formal Muslim institutions of mosque and madrasa, they played an active role in Islamic education, and in nearly every *maḥalla* girls were educated in a fashion similar to that of boys.[11] Female teachers were usually *mulla*s' wives, and were called *abïstay*[12] or *ostāzbikä/ostabikä*. Traditionally, *abïstay*s provided ethical and religious education to girls in village and town *maḥalla*s. Boys attended the *maktab*, the traditional school in a mosque; girls were taught by a *mulla*'s wife at her home following a program similar to that of a *maktab*.[13]

Formal and informal religious knowledge were interlinked in the authority of the *abïstay*, as she was central to women's lives in the *maḥalla*. She performed rituals at the request of women, read the Qur'an at various occasions and advised on different matters. Giving a sermon would constitute an important part of an *abïstay*'s religious authority.[14] Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov (Riḍā' al-Dīn bin Fakhr al-Dīn; 1859-1936),[15] the preeminent Tatar Jadīd theologian, historian, and publicist, and also *qāḍī* and *muftī* of the Muslim Spiritual Administration, produced several accounts of prominent Muslim women from

10 See Rozaliya Garipova, "Muslim Women's Religious Authority and Their Role in the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Late Imperial Russia", *Tatarica* 5 (2016), 152-63.

11 Allen Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: the Islamic world of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2001), 224.

12 The word *abïz* is derived from *ḥāfiẓ* and means a person who knows the Qur'an by heart; *abïz-tütäy/abïstay*. See: Rizaeddin Fäkhreddin, *Asar*, vol. 1 (Kazan: Rukhiyat, 2006), 232.

13 R. Valiullin, "Uchebniki dlia tatarskikh mektebe i medrese i ikh rol' v razvitii natsional'nogo obrazovaniia", in *Islam i musul'manskaia kul'tura v Srednem Povolzh'e: istoriia i sovremennost'*, ed. by H. Khasanov, R.S. Khakimov et al. (Kazan: Master Lain, 2002), 170-74.

14 Salah Kamalovich Kamalov, *Boriŋgï Tatar mäktäp wä mädräsäläre* (manuscript), Archive of the Institute of Language, Literature and History in Kazan, fond 24, opis' 1, delo 1-3, pp. 57-58. Salah Kamalov (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 in 1945-46 right after World War II when the Soviet government relaxed its policies towards religious institutions.

15 Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov is one of the most prominent Muslim scholars of the Volga-Ural region. He served as *qāḍī* of the Muslim Spiritual Administration between 1891(?) and 1906 and 1917-20, and as *muftī* from 1920 until his death in 1936. He is well-known for his role in the development of Tatar Jadidism. He was the chief editor of the most popular Jadīd journal, *Shūrā*, and published numerous other works on social and religious problems of Russia's Muslim community. He is famous for publishing several fiction and nonfiction works on Muslim women and their place in family and society. Cf. in detail Michael Kemper's article in this issue.

the region whose powerful sermons significantly impacted on individuals.[16] In his major compilations of the region's prominent Muslim scholars *Āthār* (*Traces, Works*), comprising biographies of male scholars) and famous women *Mäshhür Khātūnlar* ("Famous Women"),[17] Fakhreddinov refers to some women as '*ālima*, a female religious scholar. At *abïstay*s' homes, daughters and wives of famous scholars could study subjects not normally covered in girls' education. Some Muslim women copied books, including legal manuals and religious poetry, and even composed their own treatises.[18] Many *abïstay*s also mastered Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.[19] Most if not all of them were born into families of *imām*s, received a profound education from their fathers and mothers-*abïstay*s, married *imām*s, and became mothers of prospective religious scholars.

Family networks therefore played an important role in women's education and were a source of support to women. Mukhlisa Bubi's early life evolved within and around this traditional education network of women and men.[20] Mukhlisa was born in 1869 in Ij-Bubi to a scholarly family. Her grandfather and father held the *imām* and *mudarris* positions in Ij-Bubi, hence their *nisba*. Mukhlisa's grandmother Ḥubbijämāl *abïstay* was famous for her pedagogical and writing skills, and her mother Bädr al-Banāt was regarded as an '*ālima*.[21] In

16 Rizaeddin Fäkhreddin (Fakhreddinov), *Asar*, vol. 3-4 (Kazan: Rukhiyat, 2010), 18, 42.

17 *Mäshhür khātūnlar* is an important bibliographical dictionary in which Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov 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 (fond 7, opis' 1, delo 1) in the Archive of Ufa Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. It dates May 3, 1934, and was never published for obvious reasons. The second edition is remarkable as it includes a larger number of biographies, thirty-eight in total.

18 The grandmother of Mukhlisa Bubi, Ḥubbijämāl *abïstay*, is reported to have copied all her textbooks, which she used for teaching girls. *Mäshhür khātūnlar* (manuscript version), l. 42. 'Alimät al-Banāt is reported to have had profound writing skills (p. 157 of manuscript version). Kefeli also notes that women liked to copy hymns (*mönäjät*) books. Agnés Nilüfer Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014).

19 Kamal, *Boriñgï Tatar mäktäp vä mädräsäläre*, 57.

20 Mukhlisa's biography can be found in *Mäshhür khātūnlar* (manuscript version), l. 215 reverse.

21 Ghabdulla Bubi, *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï* in Mirkasiym Gosmanov (ed.), *Bertughan Bubilar häm Ij-Bubi mädräsäse: Tarikhi-dokumental jïentïq* (Kazan: Ruhiyat, 1999), 16-21.

1901, she performed hajj together with her son Ghobäydulla Bubi (ʿUbaydallāh Būbī; 1866-1936).

Mukhlisa's second brother, Ghabdulla Bubi (ʿAbdallāh Būbī; 1871-1922), recollected that the history of Bubi's girls' education began when their father became the *imām* of Ij-Bubi on 19 March 1857. He called this day "a day of happiness and progress" because this was also the year when his father married his mother, daughter of an *imām* and *mudarris* and herself an *ʿālima*, and started teaching boys and girls together with his wife. Bädr al-Banāt also taught Turkish and Persian to girls and mothers of her neighborhood. Ghabdulla noted that their mother rendered crucial support when they decided to create a new-method school for girls.[22]

Mukhlisa Bubi learned the basics of Islam and the Qur'an from her mother. She studied Arabic books with her father and Persian ones with her mother. She had access to her father's library and had great interest in the books that her brothers were reading. As she had a lot of questions about these books, her father and brothers began to train her more seriously. People would soon call her *mulla-abïstay*.[23] Mukhlisa also took private lessons from other religious scholars.[24] When in 1897 her brothers initiated the new-method school for girls, following the ideas they shared with other Jadīd intellectuals, they found Mukhlisa ready to assume an important role in the functioning of the school.

Jadīds Redefining Female Religious Authority and Education

Mukhlisa Bubi's brothers belonged to the first generation of Jadīds and were prominent members of Muslim modernist *ʿulamāʾ* of the Volga-Ural region. Jadīds believed that women had to participate in the movement of progress and serve the Muslim community (*millät*).[25] Since the proper education and upbringing of the younger generations was at the heart of their concern, mothers of the future generations also had to be well educated and had to know their religious and civil rights.[26]

To attain their goals, the reformist *ʿulamāʾ* wanted to create well-ordered (*intiẓāmlï*) new-method schools for girls to provide both a religious and gen-

22 Bubi, *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï*, 21, 41.

23 Al'ta Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody. Dzhadidizm i zhenskoe dvizhenie* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2006), 161-62.

24 Fakhreddinov, *Mäshhūr khātūnlar* (manuscript version), l. 215 reverse.

25 Näjïb Tūntārī, *Islāmda khātūnlarnïñ hoqūqï* (Ufa: Ṭūrmïsh, 1917), 2.

26 Riḍā al-Dīn bin Fakhr al-Dīn (Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov), *ʿĀʾilä* (Kazan: Millät, 1909), 21-22.

eral education and nurture highly ethical individuals. Jadīds complained about Muslim women's laziness and about the spread of superstition and rumors among them. A real knowledge of religion would be the foundation for a woman's strong character and good nature, as well as for happiness in the family. For a better Muslim family, the Jadīds spoke about the importance of women's education in home crafts, home and family management, medical knowledge, reading and writing skills, and a general knowledge of history and literature.

Jadīd intellectuals penned many works on the explanation and improvement of rights of women in the sociopolitical and family spheres.[27] Musa Jarullah Bigiev (Mūsā Jārallāh Bīgīyev; 1875-1949), an active leader of Muslim congresses and author of several important works on theology and law, claimed that the *sharīʿa* gave women equality with men and required them to acquire knowledge.[28] Mukhlisa's brother Ghabdulla Bubi argued that women were no different from men. He claimed that God adorned women with intelligence, but because of society's ignorance and lack of equality, they were deprived of their rights and suffered from insult and oppression. It was men's responsibility to elevate a woman to a place where she would be equal to men. Only when women knew their rights and their value would there be order and happiness in families and in society.[29]

While most Jadīds' views centered on an image of the woman as the person taking care of the family and the household, they also encouraged women to acquire more active roles in society.[30] In their pamphlets and in the Muslim press, Jadīds highlighted and praised women who contributed to charitable associations, organized and taught in girls' schools, and worked as nurses and doctors.[31]

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27 Fakhreddinov published several titles such as *Ä'ilä* (Family) (Kazan: Millät, 1909), *Tärbiyäli änä* (Well-educated mother) (Orenburg, 1909), *Dīnī wä ijtimāʿī mäs'älälär* (Religious and social issues) (Orenburg, 1914). Mukhlisa Bubi's brother, Ghabdulla Bubi, wrote *Khātūn* (Woman). Zākir al-Qādirī produced *Qïzlar dönyäsï* (The World of girls) (Kazan, 1911), and *Khātūn-qïz mäs'äläsi* (Women question) (Ufa: Ṭürmïsh, 1915), Näjib Tüntäri wrote *Islāmda khātūnlarniñ hoqūqï* (Women's rights in Islam) (Ufa: Ṭürmïsh, 1917) and Musa Bigiev compiled *Kur'an-ı Kerim Ayet-i Kerimelerinin Nurları Huzurunda Hatun* (Women in the light of the verses of the Qur'an) (1916) (published in Berlin, 1933 and reprinted in Ankara, 2001).

28 Bigiev, *Kur'an-ı Kerim Ayet-i Kerimelerinin Nurları Huzurunda Hatun*, 21, 64.

29 Ghabdulla Bubi, *Khātūn*, cited in Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody*, 73-90.

30 Fakhr al-Dīn (Fakhreddinov), *Ä'ilä* (Kazan: Millät, 1909), 21-22.

31 "Rūsyada khātūnlar ḥäräkäte", *Sūyem Bïkä* 1 (1913), 17; "Rūsyada khātūnlar", *Sūyem Bïkä* 2 (1913), 17.

In *Mäshhür khätünlar* Fakhreddinov identified such role models for women in the history of Muslim society in the Volga-Ural region for the Muslim women to look up to. Next to Mukhlisa Bubi and her mother, Bädr al-Banät, Fakhreddinov referred to historical female rulers and political leaders such as Süyem Bikä (a ruler of the Kazan khanate who was the regent for her infant son), as well as to women famous for their charity in support of mosques, *maktab*s, and madrasas, and for having taught in and organized girls' schools. Fakhreddinov included female religious scholars who had received a teaching license (*ijäza*) from male religious authorities, and women who produced treatises of social and educational importance.

The Ij-Bubi school for girls and Mukhlisa Bubi became perfect examples for the realization of these Jadidist ideals and programs. The existing traditional *abïstay* education provided fertile ground for the rise of reformed girls' madrasas and for the emergence of women like Mukhlisa. Despite the persistent criticism of some opponents of the Jadïd program, many Muslims were ready to send their daughters to reformed schools. Soon, young women themselves became a source of spreading this ideal in society, which made girls' schools even more acceptable and led to an increase in their numbers.

The Reformist Ij-Bubi Girls' School, Its Director Mukhlisa Bubi, and Her Student Räyḥänä

1895 was a decisive point in the history of the Ij-Bubi community. After finishing his studies at the prestigious *Mulkiya-i Shähäna,* an Ottoman institute of higher education to train government officials in Istanbul, Mukhlisa's brother Ghobäydulla returned to Ij-Bubi. The same year, Mukhlisa's other brother, Ghabdulla, received his *ukaz* (state license) and was officially appointed as *imäm* of the Bubi mosque. This was also the year when Ghobäydulla opened the *ibtidäiyya* (elementary) classes of the Bubi madrasa, created a new program for it, and started teaching students.[32]

Two years later, in 1897, the Bubi brothers decided to open a reformed school for girls and put Mukhlisa in charge.[33] Their wives, Näsimä and Hüsnefatïyma, also helped in the organization and teaching at the school, and Ghabdulla and Ghobäydulla also taught some subjects. In his memoir, Ghabdulla stated that

32 *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï*, 32.

33 Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov stated that Mukhlisa Bubi was the head of Ij-Bubi girls' school starting from 1897 and until its closure in 1911. See: *Mäshhür khätünlar* (manuscript vesion).

their father supported these schools ardently and defended them from all sorts of suspicion and rumors. Their mother's support was also indispensable. As Ghabdulla Bubi noted, she had the reputation of being a saint, and thanks to her support very few people opposed the Bubis when they included Russian language in the curriculum of the girls' school.[34]

Ghabdulla Bubi praised the efforts of his sister, his wife, and his sister-in-law, but made it clear that it was the men who educated the female teachers:

> These women gave all their souls and sacrificed all their energy in developing the girls' school. In the evenings, they took courses from us [men] and for the whole day they were teaching themselves. Every day, they were overcoming big obstacles, facing accusations, and without any salary continued to put a lot of labor and effort into their community/nation (*millät*).[35]

The Bubi school for girls was the first reformed and well-organized female Muslim school in Russia; in fact, this village school attracted students from cities of the Volga region (Kazan, Simbirsk, Astrakhan) and the Urals (Ufa), as well as from central Russia (Moscow, Kasimov) and even from Siberia (Tiumen), the Kazakh steppe (Semipalatinsk, Zaysan), and Central Asia (Tashkent, Samarkand, Karakul, and Bishkek). According to Ghabdulla Bubi, once the mullas who had protested the school's opening saw the school with their own eyes, they began to send their own daughters there.[36] The Ij-Bubi girls' school was particularly attractive because it issued special certificates to its graduates, granting them the right to be teachers (*mu'allima*) in other schools. The Bubis also organized three-month summer certificate teachers' training programs.[37]

We are lucky to have a manuscript with letters from Räyḥänä Batïrsha, a student at the girls' school who came from Yañāpār (present-day Aktukovo), a village in the central Russian province of Nizhnii Novgorod. Räyḥänä enrolled in 1908 and continued her studies until the school closed in 1911. Her personal correspondence with her family, friends, and Mukhlisa Bubi, her teacher, gives us a clear picture of the mentality of women involved with the reformed education and the Ij-Bubi school.[38]

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34 *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï*, 32, 41-42.

35 Ibid., 42-43.

36 Ibid., 42, 52.

37 Ibid., 47-48.

38 Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Kazan State University, Manuscript (untitled) N. 5992. From here on I cite the manuscript as *Räyḥänä letters*. The manuscript

Räyḥānä came from a religious and well-off merchant family. The family lived in a large estate with several buildings overlooking a lake. She led a pampered life with private tutors, whom she did not respect much. Her father brought her precious gifts from his business trips; her mother had special rooms prepared for Räyḥānä's friends, as her daughter wished and instructed. Because Räyḥānä's parents were concerned that this lifestyle spoiled their daughter, and worried that she was not getting a good education, they sent her to the Ij-Bubi school, more than seven hundred kilometers from Yañāpār. It was mostly her mother who supported this decision, and she wanted Räyḥānä to study in Ij-Bubi to then return to Nizhnii Novgorod province to teach local children.[39]

By 1908 the Ij-Bubi madrasa and girls' school were already well developed. From 1907 and until the school closed, the education plan changed several times. In 1910 it consisted of four elementary (*ibtidāiyya*) and four secondary (*rushdiyya*) classes. The girls' program was easier than the boys', but it was still well organized and prepared girls for a teaching career or for higher education. In 1910 the program included geography, arithmetic, Arabic, Turkic writing, Turkic grammar and literature, drawing, Qur'anic recitation, calligraphy, natural sciences, natural history, Russian, home management, and crafts.[40]

Such a loaded program was obviously difficult for a girl who had not seen any organized school before. When Räyḥānä enrolled in the secondary school at Ij-Bubi, she was both impressed and frightened. She wrote to her parents: "Compared to our old *maktab*, this *maktab* is so nice and joyful. It is very comfortable to sit and study in spacious classes,"[41] which reflects another innovation of the new-method schools, namely the incorporation of Western-style classrooms with furniture. Räyḥānä admitted that she had struggled to keep up with the program and had even thought about quitting, but then "understood its order and organization" and started to succeed in her lessons and enjoyed the company of her friends and teachers.[42]

Initially it was Räyḥānä's mother who reminded her daughter of the importance of attending a "perfect (*mukämmäl*)" and "well-ordered (*muntaẓam*)" school. Her parents first wanted to have her manners corrected (*akhlaqnï*

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contains 53 letters (several of them copied twice), including Räyḥānä's correspondence with her mother and with her teacher Mukhlisa Bubi. The author signed the letters with different names/pseudonyms. Räyḥānä, Räyḥānä Bädr al-Banāt, Shams Qamar, and just *filānä* (meaning any woman).

39 *Räyḥānä letters*, l. 13 b.

40 *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï*, pp. 41-56.

41 *Räyḥānä letters*, l. 21 b.

42 Ibid., l. 22 b- 23 a.

tūzätū),[43] and hoped to see her raised as a good person (*adäm būlmāqlïgïñ*)[44]. After that, they expected her to acquire knowledge, receive a good education (*ʿilm märʿifät taḥṣīl īdäräk*), and serve the community (*millätimizä khidmät ïlämäk*)[45]. Räyḥānä's mother wrote to her daughter:

> May Allah give you useful knowledge and a happy life … Like the way you care about your clothes to be beautiful and clean, do not forget to adorn yourself with knowledge and education (*ʿilm wä märʿifät*). A human becomes a human not with his/her clothes, but with knowledge and education. A person without knowledge is like an animal…. There is nothing as precious as knowledge. Respect and service to the nation are the things that can be attained through knowledge. Make use of your youth; there is a great opportunity for you. Study while you are young. The youth will go and never come back.[46]

Räyḥānä was admonished to study diligently (*dūrūshū*) and be the best or among the best students in her class. Her mother reminded her:

> It is not a secret for you that children of our nation (*millät*) and especially girls are so ignorant and need education so much. We see that boys and girls of other nations/communities go to schools and hold many books in their hands, while our children, especially girls, are spending time in laziness, doing nothing, hanging out, and keep quarreling. The only way out of this pitiful life is acquiring education. You are not unaware of this: that is why we [your parents] are sure that you indeed strive in your lessons. It is our goal that you come back as a well-educated lady and serve for the enlightening of our children.[47]

The *millät* that Räyḥānä's parents wanted her to serve seems to refer to the local Muslim community in Nizhnii Novgorod (where Räyḥānä eventually returned to as a teacher[48]), but in the correspondence, the term also implies the Muslim nation in Russia at large, or the religious community more broadly.[49]

43 Ibid., l. 15a.
44 Ibid., l. 14 a.
45 Ibid., l. 14 a
46 Ibid., l. 22 a.
47 Ibid., l. 13 b.
48 "Nizhegorodskie korni tataro-misharskoi obshchiny Finliandii."
49 *Räyḥānä letters*, l 22 a.

After all, Räyḥānä's classmates came from all over the Russian Empire: "All friends in my class look forward to serve the nation/community by teaching children after their graduation. If we all can realize these holy (*muqaddäs*) ideas, God willing, our community will progress (*täraqqī ṭābār*) and will overcome backwardness (*jähälät wä säfälätdän chïghār*)."[50] This quote embodies the hopes of the Bubis, and in particular their merging of religious and secular motivation for female education.

In later letters, we see that Räyḥānä internalized the goal of the Bubis and her parents. It is reflected in the way she wrote to her parents and her friends. Instead of asking for new clothes or complaining about the difficulties of the lessons or the cold weather, she often talked about diligence (*dūrūshū*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), and service (*khidmät*). She underlined that education was God's blessing (*niʿmät*) for her and that "not many people had such an opportunity (*naṣīb*) to study. I know the worth (*qadr*) of this gift."[51] She repeatedly thanked her parents for their financial and moral support.[52]

As a dedicated student, Räyḥānä developed an intimate and respectful relationship with her teacher, Mukhlisa Bubi. When Räyḥānä returned home for the summer holidays, the two regularly wrote each other. Räyḥānä wrote her teacher that as soon as she had returned home, her father had tested her knowledge in every subject she had studied. She did well on the examination, and her parents were satisfied. For this Räyḥānä thanked her teacher, and sent her a gift:

> You spent your days and nights for us, formed us into good people (*bizī adäm yāṣāyān*), showed affection more than that of our mother and father (*ātā ānādan ziyādä shäfqatlär īdän*) and gave precious advice (*wäʿaẓlär wä näṣiḥätlär*) which brought us joy and happiness. Therefore, with my thanks, I will not be even able to return one tenth of what you did for us.[53]

Her present to Mukhlisa was "an expression of the deepest love in my heart towards you."[54] In her response, Mukhlisa noted her satisfaction about Räyḥānä's

50 Ibid., l. 3 a.

51 Ibid., l. 2 a - 2 b.

52 Until 1908 students did not pay tuition at Bubi school. Afterwards, students paid a tuition in accordance with their parents' wealth. Starting from 1909 girls also paid tuition. *Bertughan Bubilar*, 52.

53 *Räyḥānä letters*, l. 10 b.

54 Ibid.

success at her father's test, and reiterated that "day and night they [the teachers] strove to form individuals with nice characters, who would become respectful of their teachers and parents." She expressed hope that Räyḥänä would graduate and serve her community by educating children.[55]

Mukhlisa's goal, and the goal of other Ij-Bubi teachers, was to elevate women's education to the "national" level, to create a group of women who would promote Jadidist ideals and better educate their children. Räyḥänä's letters vividly describe this ideal and show how Muslim women actively disseminated Jadidist ideals in the community. Räyḥänä tried to convince and encourage her close friend Saniya to enroll at the Ij-Bubi school, writing:

> May Allah increase your and my love for knowledge and let you serve the community (*millät*) with your education ... I wish that you also came here [to school] and we strive and study together and make use of this knowledge. We would succeed in learning together. Let's plan for the next year that we'll come to the madrasa together. Missing you, your most trusted friend, Räyḥänä.[56]

Räyḥänä sent to Saniya detailed descriptions of classes at the madrasa and claimed that the madrasa and the teachers were perfect. Saniya's parents were initially reluctant, but Räyḥänä's efforts paid off, and her friend eventually attended the Ij-Bubi school.[57]

When she returned to her village one summer, Räyḥänä discovered that wealthy women of her village were considering building a school for younger girls and wanted her to teach there. They were also planning to send their older daughters to the Ij-Bubi madrasa with Räyḥänä the following year. The women questioned and tested Räyḥänä to assess her education and her teaching ability. Räyḥänä informed Mukhlisa about her success and about the decisions of the women of her village to send their daughters to Ij-Bubi and set up a school for girls. Räyḥänä wrote to Mukhlisa: "There is thus hope for the women and the girls of our village. Slowly, the word about acquiring knowledge and education is spreading. I am very happy for this."[58] Indeed, in 1910 a new-method school for girls opened in Yañāpār, and she became its first teacher.[59]

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., l. 3 b.

57 Ibid., 3b, 5a-6b.

58 Ibid., l. 29 b.

59 Ol'ga N. Seniutkina and Damir V. Mukhetdinov, "Nizhegorodskie korni tataro-misharskoi obshchiny Finliandii", in *Islam na Nizhegorodchine: entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, ed. by U.Iu. Idrisov (Nizhnii Novgorod: Medina, 2007).

In other parts of the Volga-Ural region, many *abïstay*s followed the example set by the Bubi family in supporting the establishment of new-method schools for girls. Mahruy Barudi (Māhrūy Bārūdī) *abïstay*, the wife of the prominent religious scholar Ghalimjan Barudi (ʿĀlimjān al-Bārūdī), established a very successful school for girls in Kazan and trained most gifted students as future *muʿallima*s.[60] Among other famous schools for girls we can list the school of Ghalimätelbanat (ʿĀlimät al-Banāt) *abïstay*, in Yaubash, a village in Riazan province; the school of *imām* Sadretdin bin Säyfetdin and his wife Mäüdüdä (Mäwdūda) *abïstay* in St. Petersburg[61]; the school of Fatïyma (Fāṭima) *abïstay* in Agryz, a village in Viatka province; and the school of Zäynäb *abïstay* (mother of a prominent Tatar émigré scholar, Ahmet Temir) in Älmät.[62] All of these schools provided a combination of religious and secular subjects, and their graduates further disseminated Muslim modernist ideas in the Muslim community.

The Closure of Ij-Bubi Madrasa, and Mukhlisa's Career before 1917

While the Ij-Bubi schools for boys and girls became the most prominent examples of new-method education and Muslim modernism, the Russian state's suspicions about the aims of Muslim modernism increased. In the wake of the 1905 revolution, Russian officials perceived the vaguely defined discourse of Muslim modernists about the Muslim nation and unification as a political threat to the Russian state. In January 1910, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin, convened a special interministerial conference to discuss this threat and how to prevent it. Participants considered that the new-method schools were disseminating Pan-Turkist and Pan-Islamist ideas, so they decided to more strictly control them.[63] The Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered the police to crack down on the Pan-Islamist and Pan-Turkist propaganda in new-method schools and press. In late January 1911, the police conducted a three-day intensive search for Pan-Turkist and Pan-Islamist pro-

60 Ravil Ämirhan, *Imangha tughrïlïq* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap näshriyatï, 1997), 215.

61 T.Ä. Biktimirova, *Il yazmïshïn salïp iñnärenä* (Kazan: Märjäni isemendäge tarih institutï, 2006), 51-52.

62 Ahmet Temir, *Vatanım Türkiye: Rusya – Almanya – Türkiye Üçgeninde Memleket Sevgisi ve Hasretle Şekillenmiş Bir Hayat Hikayesi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2011), 17. He recalls that Zäynäb *abïstay* was called "queen of Älmät." She provided all sorts of important information about religion, health care, and other issues pertinent to the lives of women in Älmät.

63 Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 203.

paganda materials at the Ij-Bubi madrasa compound, arresting several teachers and mullas, including the Bubi brothers. The schools were closed, and the Bubis were jailed for sixteen months until their trial. Although charges of Pan-Islamism were dropped, the court sentenced Ghabdulla to six months' and Ghobäydulla to two months' imprisonment. After their release, the brothers moved to Qulja, in Eastern Turkestan, which was under Chinese rule.[64]

However, this was not the end of Mukhlisa's teaching career. In 1911, a wealthy family from Troitsk, the Yaushevs, decided to open a new-method school there, named *Sūyem Bīkä*, and invited Mukhlisa to head and organize the school. Ahmet Veli Menger, visiting the school in 1913, witnessed how Mukhlisa *abïstay* organized a new boarding school that had students from different regions. The school graduated many female teachers who, after a year's preparation, could take university examinations.[65]

Delivering a speech at the opening ceremony of the girls' school in August 1914, Mukhlisa voiced Jadidist thoughts that connected the advancement of the nation (*millät*) with the education of women that her student Räyḥānä embodied. She emphasized that "the most important thing for the happiness and preservation of our nation and the most necessary thing for strengthening our religion is educating our women and adorning them with knowledge." Women had to study even more than men, and mothers had "big powers and holy tasks" in their hands (i.e., raising children in an intelligent and patriotic way).[66] She skillfully linked the fate and progress of the community with religion, women's education, and the new generation they would raise. She hoped to see as many female graduates as possible teaching in other towns and villages of the Russian empire. Delivering another speech a year later at the opening of the Female Teachers' School (also located in Troitsk and financed by the Yaushevs), she expressed joy that it had become possible in the Russian empire for female graduates to obtain an official teaching certificate. She rejoiced that such schools would allow hundreds or maybe thousands of girls to grow "in their native language and in the national spirit (*millī ruḥta*)," "pure Muslim children who will be ready to sacrifice themselves for their nation and

64 *Bubi mädräsäseneñ qïsqa tarikhï*, 83. See also Mustafa Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, chapter 9 "Imperial paranoia."

65 Ahmet Veli Menger, "Bubi medresesi ve Bubi kardeşler", *Kazan*, 3 (March 1971), 40.

66 Most probably her brother Ghabdulla wrote the speech, as it is included in a manuscript among his papers at the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of Kazan State University. *Ghabdulla Bubiniñ Goljada yazghan törle makaläläre, yazmalarï*, manuscript no. 208T, vol. 2, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Kazan State University, 204a -206b, 225a - 228b. The speech is reproduced in Al'ta Makhmutova, "Fenomen Mukhlisy Bubi", *Ekho vekov* 1/2 (2000).

country." She thanked the Yaushevs for understanding this and for sponsoring a special school for girls and a teachers' school for women.[67]

We have seen that Mukhlisa's career up to 1917 was built on two pillars: tradition and modernity. She was a member of a family with traditional religious pedigree – a daughter of an influential *abïstay* and a respected *imām*. Through her brothers she became involved in the Muslim modernist movement and emerged as an able organizer and educator respected by her students as a role model and whose services were sought for the organization of reformed school for girls in different parts of the Russian empire. Mukhlisa's career, in combining traditional and modernist authority, was crucial for her election as a *qāḍī* in 1917.

Russian Revolutions, Women's Rights, and Mukhlisa's Election as a *qāḍī*

The years following the 1905 revolution witnessed the proliferation not only of the Jadīd movement but also of the women's rights movement, which impacted on the Muslim population of the whole Russian empire.[68] As Ghabdulla Bubi wrote in *Khātūn*, the period following the Revolution of 1905-07 was a turning point in the awakening of Muslim women in Russia. It was the period when girls' schools proliferated and teachers' schools for women opened.[69] As the list of graduates of the Ij-Bubi school shows us, and as Mukhlisa hoped, most female students assumed public responsibilities teaching in different schools; some became medical workers, and many continued their professions in the Soviet period.[70] Eventually, graduates of schools like Ij-Bubi began to occupy a prominent place in the public sphere. Moreover, Ij-Bubi and other Jadīd schools for girls were not the only institutions where Muslim women acquired education.

Many Muslim women followed the lead of both Muslim modernists and Russian feminists in voicing their demands for higher education and equality

67 Al'ta Makhmutova, "Fenomen Mukhlisy Bubi", *Ekho vekov* 1/2 (2000).

68 "Rusyada khātūnlar ḥäräkäte", *Sūyem Bīkä* 1 (1913), 17; "Rusyada khātūnlar", *Sūyem Bīkä* 2 (1913), 17; Tamina A. Biktimirova, *Stupeni obrazovaniia do Sorbonny* (Kazan: Alma-Lit, 2003), 58-66, 92-110; Fāḍïl Ṭūykīn, "Ṭürmïsh mäydānïnda khātūnlar", *Sūyem Bīkä*, 4 (1913), 8.

69 Bubi, *Khātūn*, cited in Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody,* 90.

70 Rafilia Gimazova, *Prosvetitel'skaia deiatel'nost' Nigmatullinykh-Bubi* (*konets XIX – nachalo XX vekov*) (Kazan: Pechatnyi Dvor, 2004),193-219.

in society.[71] Fakhreddinov's own daughter Zäynäb graduated in 1915 from Russian *gimnaziia* with honours and in 1923 entered the medical school of Kazan University.[72] We have long lists of Muslim women who studied in Russian-Tatar schools, in Russian *gimnaziia*s, in higher education classes for women (*Vysshie zhenskie kursy*), and in universities.[73] Many of these women assumed active positions in society. They not only taught but also established Muslim women's associations and benevolent societies, and organized fundraising activities for charities.[74] Among graduates of Jadīd and Russian institutions there appeared Muslim poetesses and writers who began to write in the expanding Muslim press, bringing to the forefront issues of women's emancipation, education, and rights.[75] Many of them wrote in *Sūyem Bīkä*, a Muslim women's journal founded by Yaqub Khalili (Yāʿqūb Khalīlī), a graduate of Ij-Bubi madrasa, and his sister Äsma (Äsmāʾ).[76]

While the 1905 revolution enabled reformist Muslim men and women to be more active in the public space, the 1917 February revolution greatly boosted Muslim women's activism: the declaration of universal suffrage for the election of the Constitutional Assembly in Russia granted political equality to all women, including Muslim women.[77] Gaining equal political rights with men after the 1917 February revolution, female Muslim activists participated in the debates on the formation of new political and social order, organizing women's gatherings and congresses and attending, on an equal footing with men, the All-Russian Muslim Congress. Elected women delegates from different regions of the Russian empire came together for the All-Russian Muslim Women's Congress on 23 April 1917 in Kazan.

There were socialists, communists, and secularists among the delegates, but proposals to solve women's problems were discussed within the framework of Islamic law. After serious debates, female delegates prepared resolutions to be submitted to the All-Russian Muslim Congress and requested that the Congress approve their suggestions. The resolution underlined the demand for the recognition of gender equality in Islamic law, women's right to participate in elections, and certain improvements in women's marital rights. The prohibition of polygyny could not be agreed on, as a considerable number of delegates

71 Biktimirova, *Stupeni obrazovaniia*, 103-05, 114-116, 125-131.

72 Ibid., 122.

73 Ibid., 147-167.

74 "Rusyada khātūnlar", *Sūyem Bīkä* 2 (1913), 17.

75 Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody*, 30-52.

76 Ibid., 44. See for example Muʿallimä Umm Kulthūm Tīrishqāwiya "Bizniñ ḥāl", *Sūyem Bīkä* 4 (1913).

77 Marianne Kamp, "Debating Sharia", 13.

found this against the rulings of Islamic law. Instead of proposing an outright ban on polygyny, the resolution suggested women obtain, on marriage, a written assurance from their husbands either that they would not take a second wife or that they would grant divorce and alimony (*nafaqa*) to their first wives if they did take a second wife.[78] The delegates who opposed polygyny decided to defend their position at the All-Russian Muslim Congress in Moscow.

In Moscow, the debate on the "women's question" continued for two days, at sessions on 9 and 10 May 1917. For the first time in Volga-Ural history, Muslim women participated in a congress with men and discussed women's issues and other questions on an equal basis with them. Most delegates supported the women's demands. Musa Bigiev backed their demands for unconditional equality by his reinterpretation of Qur'anic injunctions and Islamic law. However, there were also serious reactions to the women's demands. Several *ʿulamā'* took the stage to argue that equal rights for women in all aspects of social and political life starkly contradicted *sharīʿa*.[79] They also argued that their electorate particularly demanded the protection of Islamic law at the congress, and their preferences had to be respected. Even the most conservative *ʿulamā'*, however, could not disregard the fact that women had already acquired political equality, and they agreed that injustice in polygamous marriages had to be ended.[80] Because Islamic law was the main force uniting Russian Muslims, neither outright denial of Islamic law's stipulations nor radical reforms were an option for even the most radical and reformist delegates. Maintaining political unity and acquiring communal or territorial rights were more important than resolving women's problems. As Marianne Kamp underlines, this was because the *sharīʿa* united Russian Muslims and differentiated them from other populations in the Russian empire.[81] So, further improvement of women's rights within the *sharīʿa*'s framework would be entrusted to a woman of religious authority and modernist world view who would be a part of the renewed and strengthened central religious institution.

The election of *qāḍī*s and a *muftī* was a crucial event for the Muslim community on different levels. Candidates for *qāḍī* were not restricted to Kazan *ʿulamā'*, as previously; instead, other Muslim communities of Russia could nominate their candidates. Among the candidates for the positions of *muftī* and *qāḍī*s there were numerous Jadīds, both religious scholars (such as Käshshāf

78 *Bütün Rūsya Möselmānlarïnïñ 1917-nche yïlda 1-11 Mayda Mäskäwdä būlghān ʿumūmī isyezdïnïñ "Prūtāqūllarï"* (Petrograd: Emānat, 1917), 356.

79 *Bütün Rūsya Möselmānlarïnïñ*, 341-44.

80 Ibid., 373-74, 380-82.

81 Kamp, "Debating Sharia", 26.

Tärjemänī, Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov, Musa Bigiev, Ghalimjan Barudi, Ḥasan ʿAṭā ʿAbäshī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmarov, and Najīb Tūntārī) and secular intellectuals (such as Ṣadrī Maqṣūdī, Hādī Āṭlāsī, Shähär Shäräf, and the writers Zākir al-Qādirī and ʿAzīz ʿUbäydullīn [Göbäydullin/Gubaidullin]). However, in the end the elected *muftī*, Ghalimjan Barudi, and the *qāḍī*s were all religious scholars, albeit with a reformist world view. The members of the Moscow convention situated this change within the Islamic framework and preserved the religious character of the Central Spiritual Administration.[82]

Next to Mukhlisa Bubi, there were two other women among the candidates for the *qāḍī* position: Märyäm Pātāsheva[83] and Fakhr al-Banāt Akchūrina.[84] But Pātāsheva and Akchūrina lacked higher religious education. During the earlier sessions on the women's question, secular intellectuals and feminists had already realized that they could not insist on complete equality of rights between men and women, and that they could not push for female candidates with secular educational backgrounds only to be elected as *qāḍī*. Pātāsheva even declined to participate in the election.[85] Mukhlisa might not have been the most eligible candidate for the feminists, as she was not one of them. But they could still support her candidacy, considering that the other two female candidates had little or no chance of being elected.

Mukhlisa's candidacy and election provoked little reaction at the congress, and reports on the elections listed her name without any special emphasis, but the traditional *ʿulamā'* shortly expressed their discontent. The editors of the foremost traditionalist journal, *Dīn wä maʿīshat*,[86] called her election "a religious and political mistake of the Moscow congress which disturbed the *ʿulamā'* class." This event "was not in accordance with *sharīʿa* books and it keeps bothering the considerate *imām*s." Citing a *ḥadīth* that states "nations that give women power to rule are doomed," the editors even interpreted the

82 *Bütün Rūsya Möselmānlarïnïñ*, 332-33.

83 Märyäm Pātāsheva studied in the Russian gimnaziia Number 2 in Orenburg and later continued her education in Psihonevrologicheskii Institut in St. Petersburg. Biktimirova, *Stupeni obrazovaniia*, 149, 161.

84 I could not find any information about Fakhr al-Banāt Akchūrina. She is mentioned neither in the lists of women who studied in Russian educational institutions nor in the list of women who participated in the Muslim Women's Congress.

85 *Bütün Rūsya Möselmānlarïnïñ*, 332.

86 *Dīn wä maʿīshat* was a weekly journal published between 1906 and 1918 in Orenburg. It was a religious, scholarly, literary, and political journal and represented the views of the Volga-Ural *ʿulamā'*. For the analysis of this journal and how the traditionalist *ʿulamā'* thought about the concepts of progress and change see Rozaliya Garipova "The Protectors of Religion and Community: Traditionalist Muslim Scholars of the Volga-Ural Region at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", *Jesho* 59 (2016), 126-65.

political and social turmoil of 1917 as a consequence of the election of a woman as *qāḍī*. *Dīn wä maʿīshat* editors further claimed that *imām*s who regarded Mukhlisa's election as an illegitimate act imposed by "irreligious groups" (*diyānätsezlär ṭarafïndan*) refused to follow the directives of the Central Spiritual Administration signed by Mukhlisa even if that would cost them their licenses.[87]

The Central Spiritual Administration tried to mitigate the *ʿulamā'*s resistance to Mukhlisa's election by sending questionnaires to prominent *imām*s asking for the reasons behind their reaction. The first question in the questionnaire, dated 31 October 1917, was: "On what basis do you not recognize Mukhlisa Bubi as a *qāḍī*?" One of the respondents of the questionnaire, Mīr Ḥäydar Kamāl al-Dīn (Kamaleddinov), published his responses in *Dīn wä maʿīshat* and listed some Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions pointing to the inferiority of women in reasoning and other aspects, and the superiority of men over women. He cited religious evidence against the election of a woman as a *qāḍī* and also claimed that the traditionalist *ʿulamā'* opposed the election of a woman at the Moscow Congress and perceived it as a fait accompli.[88]

Two months after the election, Mukhlisa quit her job as the director of a girls' school in Troitsk and started working at the Central Spiritual Administration, in the Department of Family Affairs, overseeing and regulating family problems. She was reelected as *qāḍī* during the next elections of *muftī* and *qāḍī*s in 1923 and 1926, even though some people continued to question the appropriateness of a woman being in this position.[89] She remained a *qāḍī* until 1937.

Aftermath: Mukhlisa in the 1920s and 30s

Mukhlisa became the head of the Family Department, which was responsible for several tasks, including the keeping of the civil registry books, regulating family issues, issuing *fatwā*s on marital questions, and keeping the journals of incoming cases. She noted that she mostly worked on family questions, striving to curtail polygyny and to educate women about their equal rights with

87 Mīr Ḥäydar Kamāl al-Dīnuf, "Dīniyä idäräsīnä jäwāb", *Dīn wä maʿīshat* 48-49 (1917), 515-17.

88 On the resistance of the *ʿulamā'* to Mukhlisa's election see also Gimazova, *Prosvetitel'skaia deiatel'nost' Nigmatullinykh-Bubi*, 91-94.

89 Sirena Bagavieva "Religiia vasha ostalas' tol'ko v vashei vole", *Ekho vekov* 1-2 (1999).

men.[90] As Kazan University historian Al'ta Makhmutova suggests, Mukhlisa quickly established her authority as a *qāḍī*. Word spread that she was fair and just, and women travelled from the four corners of Russia to Ufa to seek her advice in family discordance.[91]

Resolving family disputes and releasing women from failed marriages had personal relevance for Mukhlisa. Until 1917 she was still bound in an unsuccessful marriage. Her parents had given her in marriage on 12 February 1887 to an *imām*, but her marriage had proven to be miserable. Out of respect to her parents and relatives, she had endured this marriage for several years. In 1894 she had adopted a child of their servant, who had died in childbirth, and in 1895 she had given birth to a daughter of her own, Munjiya. But in 1897 she had left her husband and returned to her native village.[92] Her husband had refused to grant her divorce. It was only on 23 December 1917 that *qāḍī* Rizaeddin Fakhreddinov granted her an official divorce.[93] Her efforts to improve the status of women was not only limited to her work as a female *qāḍī*, who issued *fatwā*s and adjudicated on family law cases. To educate women about their legal rights, Mukhlisa published articles and officially instructed *imām*s to protect women's rights and to allow women to attend religious sermons.

In August 1917, she addressed women and young ladies in the newspaper *Yuldūz*, noting that the Central Spiritual Administration had received many complaints about men who took second wives and about *imām*s who performed second marriages. She wondered why these women agreed to become second wives, knowing that neither their parents nor anyone else any longer had the right to force them into marriage. Mukhlisa argued that, in these cases, the man who took a second wife, the *imām* who performed the second marriage, and the girl who agreed to marry as a second wife were all at fault. She suggested that the Central Spiritual Administration should send a directive to all *imām*s obliging them first, before performing a marriage, to investigate the man, warn the man not to take a second wife, and advise the woman to refuse to become a second wife.[94]

One of Mukhlisa's first tasks soon after her election was to compose a model marriage contract, which she prepared and signed with another *qāḍī*,

90 Suleiman Rakhimov, "Vinovnoi sebia ne priznala. Materialy sledstvennogo dela Mukhlisy Bobinskoi", *Ekho vekov* 1-2 (2000).

91 Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody*, 171-72.

92 *Mäshhür khātūnlar* (manuscript version), biography of Mukhlisa Bubi; Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody*, 161-62.

93 Makhmutova, *Pora i nam zazhech' zariu svobody*, 162.

94 Mukhlisa Bubi, "Khānïm wä tutashlargha khitābnāmä", *Yuldūz* 1833 (1917).

Ghabdulla Söläymani (ʿAbdallāh Sulaymānī), as an instruction to all *maḥalla imām*s.[95] The document was a step forward in defending Muslim women's marital rights. Rather than claiming to be based on the "equal rights" principle, it was an attempt to bring change from within the framework of *sharīʿa*. The document instructed *maḥalla imām*s to pay attention to the importance of the *taʿlīq* (conditions in a marriage contract), "the benefits of which many *imām*s did not know for some reasons and did not clarify to the community."[96] To prevent the miserable state of women in marriages due to certain circumstances, it was suggested that *imām*s would read aloud the stated conditions of marriage and explain their usefulness to the people at the marriage. According to the marriage contract, a woman could divorce herself from undesired marriage (*ṭalāq bāʾin*) if she suffered as a result of her husband's continuous alcohol consumption and gambling, if he kept her one year without financial maintenance (*nafaqa*), if he had venereal diseases, or if he married a second wife without her permission.[97]

Mukhlisa continued to struggle for women's rights in the 1920s. In October 1923, she called on all *imām*s and *muḥtasib*s of inner Russia and Siberia to address several problems in marriage and divorce cases. Levirate marriages (when a widowed woman had to marry a male relative of her deceased husband) must be prohibited. Child marriages, or marriages of people younger than the legal marriage age,[98] marriages that often occurred "for the sake of some worldly interests," must be banned because it was a grave wrongdoing to destroy the future of these children, and the material and spiritual damage of such marriages were obvious to everyone. People must be dissuaded from organizing expensive marriages, and encouraged to allocate money to meet the couple's basic marital needs instead of spending money on feasts and being driven into debt. Couples should be instructed about each other's rights and obligations in marriage and should take at least an oral oath that they had understood their rights.[99] Mukhlisa wrote this document in an authoritative voice. She underlined that she had compiled this document as a part of her

95 "Ḥoqūq izdiwājnï saqlawda sharïʿa ṭarafïndan döres küreleb bilād-i islāmiyada bi l-fiʿl ʿamalä quelghān fāʾidalï sharṭlar", Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts (*Otdel redkikh rukopisei i knig*), Library of Kazan State University, Document no. 48 (printed document).

96 "Ḥoqūq izdiwājnï saqlawda".

97 Ibid.

98 In 1836 the Russian state introduced Marriage age law for the Muslim community. The law set the legally marriageable age at sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys.

99 *Tsirkularlar, otchetlar, 1919-1927*, manuscript no. 1197 T, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Kazan State University, ll. 10-10 reverse.

"sacred duty" (*moqaddäs burïch*) to protect the rights of her fellow women. She also mentioned that she had obtained the permission of the general committee of the Religious Administration to send out this document.[100]

Another document that Mukhlisa authored with other *qāḍī*s was a collective *fatwā* of the religious administration allowing women to divorce husbands who had disappeared during the First World War and the 1921-23 famine in the Volga region. The document was produced in response to many petitions from Muslim women requesting divorce in accordance with *sharīʿa*, to relieve them from their marital bonds and allow them to remarry. These women could not sustain themselves, and the *fatwā* offered a chance for their remarriage, after meeting certain conditions – a divorce that Ḥanafī law would normally make difficult to obtain.[101]

In the mid-1920s, Mukhlisa continued to write in *Islām mäjälläse* about the importance of Islamic upbringing and religious education in the general education of the new generation.[102] Although the fierce persecution of Muslim clerics and ban on Muslim education would start only after 1927, the Soviet regime's antireligious stance was evident. Antireligious propaganda became a state policy, and several radical antireligious periodicals appeared with government support.[103] The Soviet state intensified its control and pressure over Muslim religious institutions starting from 1922. Highest state organs issued orders to terminate religious education. In early 1923 the People's Commissariat for Education took a decision to prevent the study of religion in Muslim schools and All-Russian Central Executive Committee (*Vserossiiski tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet*) issued a decree on the closure of religious schools. These were accompanied by a series of antireligious lectures in factories and other places.[104] In 1923, in a circular, Mukhlisa urged *maḥalla imām*s of inner Russia and Siberia to encourage women and children to attend mosques to listen to sermons. Noting that the number of women who traditionally received religious education and ethical upbringing with *abïstay*s was rapidly diminishing, she requested *imām*s, and men in general, to find time to provide religious education to women and children at mosques during Friday prayers or in the

100 *Tsirkularlar, otchetlar, 1919-1927*, ll. 10-10 reverse.

101 "Fatwā bābï. Ikenche fatwā. ʿĀʾilälärniñ nikāḥlārïn faskh ḥaqïnda", *Islām mäjälläse* 1 (1926), 546-48.

102 Mukhlisa Bubi, "Islām dönyāsïnda khātūnlar", *Islām mäjälläse* 1 (1924), 28.

103 Philip Walters, "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy", in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union,* ed. by Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3-30.

104 R. Nabiev, A. Khabutdinov "Religioznaia politika v 1920 – nachale 1940 godov" in *Islam v srednem Povolzh'e: istoriia i sovremennost'* (Kazan': Institut istorii akademii nauk Tatarstana, 2001), 346-49.

evenings. Talking about the urgent need for such education, she stated that this was a very sacred and beneficial deed (*säwabli*).[105]

In the 1924 issue of *Islām mäjälläse*, Mukhlisa pointed to women's primary role in transmitting religious knowledge and ethics under the tsarist regime. She underlined that "our mothers and grandmothers preserved our sacred religion of Islam facing many obstacles in teaching and learning religion."[106] In the environment of the renewed antireligious campaign, she stressed that young girls must acquire a religious education because "teaching Islam will be a duty that they will face in the future." She appealed to *imām*s to allow girls to attend and benefit from their mosques' religious classes for children and to allow them to be taught in the same class as boys if a separate class for girls could not be organized. She underlined that it was important to prepare girls as teachers of religious knowledge and ethics "to their most intimate (*serdäsh*) and close people – husbands and children."[107] These truly prophetic statements and suggestions proved vital under the later Soviet rule, when women had to transmit religious knowledge to young generations and, very often, to men, after religious scholars and other men who had religious knowledge died as a result of repression, hunger, or war, or were sent to camps or into exile.[108]

As a leading Muslim religious figure, Mukhlisa became a victim of the Great Terror along with many male religious scholars. In 1936 the Soviet regime began to arrest Muslim clerics. In the Bashkir Republic alone, around seven hundred *imām*s were subject to repression. Mukhlisa was the only female religious cleric among them. In November 1937, she was accused of being a member of a counterrevolutionaary bourgeois-nationalist organization and of being a liaison between that counterrevolutionary organization and foreign intelligence services – a case the NKVD fabricated with speed and detail. NKVD interrogated her several times. Although she rejected all the accusations, she was executed a month later, on 23 December 1937, at the age of 68.[109]

105 *Tsirkularlar, otchetlar, 1919-1927*, ll. 10-10 reverse.

106 Mukhlisa Bubi, "Islām dönyāsïnda khātūnlar", 28.

107 Ibid.

108 In my interviews with contemporary *abïstay*s born in the 1920s and 1930s, conducted during the summer of 2014, it was primarily their mothers who taught them religious knowledge.

109 Rakhimov, "Vinovnoi sebia ne priznala."

Conclusion

In this paper, I have identified the factors that contributed to the emergence of the first woman *qāḍī* in the history of the modern Islamic world. Such an unprecedented event might be assumed a glitch of history, an extraordinary event that happened because of the Russian revolution of February 1917; in fact, it was the result of a convergence of several factors among which were tradition, Muslim modernism, and the revolutionary moment.

Throughout her long tenure as a *qāḍī*, Mukhlisa continued to wield authority in regulating family disputes in the Muslim community. She also used her authoritative status to improve the rights of women in the family, as well as their rights to access education and religious knowledge. Had the Soviet state not ended her life and career, along with most of the Muslim religious and educational establishment, her example as a woman of higher religious authority and knowledge could have been institutionalized among the Volga-Ural Muslims.

In more recent times, Mukhlisa's personality has become increasingly revered within Russia's Muslim community. In 2014, Kazan Tatar Theatre staged a play about her. She is remembered as *mulla-abïstay*, emphasizing her knowledge of Islamic theology and law. The contemporary Tatar women's organization *Aq Qalfaq*, which organized "Mukhlisa Bubi Readings" with the World Tatar Congress and the youth organization *Üzebez,* noted that her personality should serve as an exemplary model for the upbringing of the young generation of Muslim women. There were plans to create a special prize named after her and to rename a Kazan street in her honour.[110] In 2014 the Museum of Islamic Culture in Kazan opened a permanent exhibition devoted to her life.[111] The most prominent *abïstay*s claim the title of "the second Mukhlisa Bubi," perpetuating her legacy.[112]

110 <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-33841.html> (accessed on 20 July 2015).

111 <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-144793.html> (accessed on 20 July 2015).

112 Personal interview with Rashidä Iskhaqi in June-July 2014. She passed away on 22 April 2016.