

# Gender Component in the National Project of Kazakhstan

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**Abstract**—This article describes the aspects of the formation of the national idea and national identity through the prism of gender control and its contradistinction to the obsolete, Soviet component. The role of females in ethnic and national projects is considered from the point of view of Dr. Nira Yuval-Davis: as biological reproducers of the ethnic communities' members; as reproducers of the borders of ethnic/national groups; as central participants in the ideological reproduction of community and transducers of its culture; as symbols in ideology, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; and as participants of national, economical, political and military combats. The society of the transitional type uses the symbolic resources of the formation of gender component in the national project. The gender patterns act like cultural codes, executing the important ideological function in formation of the national female' image, i.e. the discussion on hijab - it's not just the discussion on control over the female body, it's the discussion on the metaphor of social order.

**Keywords**—nation, gender, hijab, Islam, ideology, politics, national idea, national identity, society of the transitional type

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE document national project as the subject of the formation and universalization of the national idea, according to our reckoning assumes the reference to the matter of gender equality. From this point of view it should be understood, that the gender identity in Kazakhstan is formed under the influence of neotraditionalism and globalization. The acquisition of sovereignty by Kazakhstan had led to the necessity of search for its own national idea and reconstruction of the relevant national identity. This fact had actualized the reinterpretation of the cultural and symbolic resources, being the basics for the creation of the original community in relation to other external ones.

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The discussions on the national idea are caused by the change of vector of political interests and interest of the political elite in legitimation of the political power and construction of the national identity. Nevertheless, «until present time none of the countries of the near-abroad had managed to approach its social discussions to the stage of «crystallization» of its apprehensions and national idea» [1]. The vanished common territory and common language stimulate most of all the generation of the national myth and common national identity. A demand arose for the validation and «justification» of the national sovereignty as the constituent part of the nation of such imaginative community, and this demand became the inevitable necessity.

The national idea, determining the directions of the country's development, includes the gender factor. The important function of the gender metaphor in the national idea is the approach of the nation's idea to the everyday experience of the individual.

These are the terms of the gender metaphorization of the social and natural phenomenon. And precisely what items, properties and relations are correlated with masculine and/or feminine nature? As well, what are the consequences of such a metaphorization for the gender order in the society? One of the principal statements of the gender research is the thesis as follows: the cultural and symbolic component bears the axiological orientation and provisions. Such phenomena as nature, culture, emotional and rational, spiritual and embodied - are equated to the masculine or feminine in the way of creating inside these pairs of unique hierarchy - «gender asymmetry», which assumes the matter of the androcentrism. The masculine matter is placed in the center and considered as positive and dominating; the feminine matter is considered negative and peripheral. As a result «the symbolic woman is construed as the deviation of the norm» [2. p.16]. The hierarchy of masculine and feminine influences the hierarchy of the social subjects (and individuals, i.e. cultures), when marked as feminine or masculine they imply the attributing of the corresponding properties and - what is principal - corresponding position in the social hierarchy. The interpretation of feminine as deviant with need to be under control, defines the major - but not only - form of gender metaphorization: the masculinization of the Friend and the feminization of the Foe. One more principal statement for the clarification of the methodology must be depicted. As emphasized by K.Kon, the gender metaphorization works «in reverse» as well; the exhibition of such qualities as, i.e. the ability to think abstractly, the ability to be objective, the habit to appeal to mind and not emotions, serves simultaneously as the demonstration of masculinity - and it means «to be in the privileged position of discourse» [3. p.229].

In other words, the attributing to some culture, as to «mystique», «chaotism», and «irrationality», depicts its gender characteristic, and it is quite definite. In its turn, the feminization, for example, of Orient is equally the orientalizing of the feminine and of woman - with all of the corresponding statutory consequences. Hence, one more reason for the inclusion of gender discourse in the discourse of the national idea is the potestarity of the gender, its role in the relations of power/abundance. One of the key statements of the gender research is the idea of the inequity of the present gender order (mostly named as «patriarchate»), when the men are in a privileged position compared to women. Gender is the primary mean of marking the power relations - as this idea is formulated by J. Scott [4. p. 422].

We attempt to visualize how the national concepts are being constructed by gender applying the idea of Dr. Nira Yuval-Davis on the major roles of females in the ethnical and national projects. She considers them as:

- biological reproducers of the ethnic communities' members;
- reproducers of the borders of ethnic/national groups;
- central participants in the ideological reproduction of community and transducers of its culture;
- symbols in ideology, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories;
- and participants of national, economical, political and military combats [5].

Dr. Nira Yuval-Davis thinks, that the pressure imposed on women to have or not to have children, usually concerns them «not as humans, workers and/or wives, but as members of the certain national communities». She also says, that a woman «is endowed» with the liabilities for the biological reproduction in certain discourse and «is elevated» in this role, and becomes the subject of worship. Dr. Yuval-Davis points out three major directions in the demographical policy. The first one appeals to the future of the country, which depends on its consistent growth. The State applies to all of the mechanisms, starting from the ideological and up to the economical, for the motivation of childbirth. The second direction is connected with eugenics, where the center is given not to the size of the country but to its «quality». This politics includes the management of immigration, mandatory sterilization and mass control of childbirth. The third direction is based on Malthusianism, being characteristic to the developing countries, targeted to the limitation of the childbirth, i.e. China and India. As per Yuval-Davis, the effect of Malthusianism policy is extremely gender, because the boys are more desirable, hence the methods of abortion and infanticide are mainly oriented to the female babies.

Kazakhstan implements the policy of the first direction. The gender relations in Kazakhstan, basically, held the traditional character, where the maternal function absolutely positively represents the females in social activities. According to the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, and Chairman of the National Commission for women affairs and family and demographic policy under President of Kazakhstan Mrs. G. Abdykalikova: «The official state statistics shows since 2002 some demographical growth takes place mostly due to the

increase of childbirth. But such growth is not enough for the social and economical development, geopolitical stability and safety of the country. These days the state demographic politics is being conceptually revised, the modern approaches and resources are being formed for the execution of this task, including legislative, project and analytical and organizational measures. Further on there will be continued the work on recreation of the best family, ethnic and cultural traditions contributing to the strengthening of the moral and ethic basis of marriage and family, creation of the necessary terms and conditions for the realization of the economic, reproductive and cultural and psychological functions of the family, and to the improvement of life quality of families [6].

Dr. Yuval-Davis confirms, that the mythical unity of the «national assumed communities» is ideologically supported by the whole system of symbolic «frontiersmen». The symbolic markers are connected with the cultural codes, depicted in behaviour, wardrobe, traditions, works of art and national language. Movies and advertisements influence the social imaginations, directing the everyday social practices, and at the same time constructing the identity, they also influence the understanding of «womanhood» and «manhood». The national symbols, national costumes, mythology, oral folklore, religion and up to the allusion of a Mother's character in the anthem form the unified national image of either gender, divided into the age-related and social categories.

The females are obliged to transfer the rich heritage of ethnic symbols, traditions and values to the young members of the group. At this point Dr. Yuval-Davis emphasizes the need to consider «the culture» «as the dynamic process, constituent change, full of internal contradictions, which are used differently by different social and political agents». The State assigns to the women the raising, transition of social culture to the new generations. In Kazakhstan's society the role of Mother as the keeper of traditions and values of nation, extraordinary representatives of the gentle sex, who became the ultimate pride of the nation, is being constantly emphasized in private and public sectors. The application of the images of great Kazakh women in political rhetoric and literature takes place in different projects (i.e. miscellany «The Firebirds of the Great Steppe» by A.Tulembayev). Another example, the renaming of the street names in honour of the famous women (the onomastic analysis by Mrs. S. Shakirova) or the «Azhar» project («History. Women. Kazakhstan») held by the Association of the business-women of Kazakhstan, when the famous female contemporaries participate in photo-session visualizing the images of historical female persons from Tomiris, the conqueror of the king Kir, to the contemporary female scientists.

The women not only transit the cultural heritage of the ethnic and national groups, but they as well «symbolize» it meaning the ethnic/national differences in construction, reproduction and changes of ethnic/national categories. The country usually appears as the beloved woman in danger or as the mother, who lost her sons in battle. For the Mother-homeland men go to war. The definite codes and instructions usually get developed, showing the «real» woman and «real» man.

The revival of the conservative ideology is seen in the fact, that most of the social and personal problems are under the management of the traditional family, informal networks, reconstruction of patriarchal system and actualization of the demographic policy. According to B. Anderson «The nation as the imaginative community is based on the assumption of the common origin, culture, language, destiny, borders or territory and historical continuity. The authorities organize such imagination through the commonness of origin, culture. Different versions of <nationality> and womanhood traditionally are one of the most powerful mechanisms of such an imaginative unity»[7]. These versions, codes of gender relations constitute the right womanhood and masculinity, forcing to the defined behaviour.

The national mass-media legitimate gender ideas and terminology, formed by gender politics and ideology, significantly increasing the possibility of their adoption by the auditorium. The Kazakhstan' cinema, different by genre and synopsis lines, effectively use the gender images for expressing certain intentions and emphasizing the womanish and mannish in culture. The «Baksy» movie tells about the witch-woman, whose image is very metaphorical and symbolizes the nation (N. Yuval-Davis, K. Scott, D. Patman, E. Gapova). The nation like a woman in the anomia period finds the shelter in such way of life, when there are no legal and effective methods of problem solving, and the previous life order becomes impossible, the old values are gone, and the new values are not yet effective. This movie demonstrates again the idea of E. Yarskaya-Smirnova and P. Romanov on the role of otherness in cinema discourse, in renaissance of the patriarchal relations of power/dependency, «where «the imperfect» men and women exemplify the nettled or enlightened nation, becoming the marks-icons of impuissance or internal spiritual power, dependency and veracity. In this way the gender metaphorization of borders of national identity takes place; the paths of family, kinship, male and female «sexual validity» lead to the essentialization of the social differences of types insider/outsider»[8].

The complex peripeties of the heroes of the «Tulip», «Racketeer», «Agayindar» and «Zhanym» movies bring them or return them to the womb of their families. The spectators see that neither modern, nor capitalism can shake such institution as family. According to Y. Slezkin: «Domesticity is the universal human quality, and a family is the most fundamental and conservative of all of the human institutions (and the major source of religious and political rhetoric). Any radical attempt to change the humankind assaults the family, and all of them either fail or get postponed. The analogy with family is the element of discursive practices of nationalism, mostly defining its concepts, symbols, and its hierarchy of values. The image of family plays the ultimate role in the nation-buildup, as well as the image of Mother as the visualization of Homeland and the image of Father as the symbol of statehood.

There is a big interest in national culture of Kazakhstan in research of the archetype of the woman as the mediator in traditional and modern literature. The researchers Z.Nautyzbayeva, T.Asemkulov, and S.Kondybai assume that

«the reincarnation on the new level of the ancient archetype of the woman-Mother, the messenger of another world, depicting the supreme, creative origin of the humankind, gives hope for the impressive reincarnation of this origin in the life of the young Kazakhstan' state».

And in conclusion - the participation in national, economical, political and military combats. The history of any country contains the examples of the female participation in liberation struggle. In our national history the special place is held by the Heroes of the USSR - sniper Aliya Moldagulova and machine-gunner Manshuk Mаметova. They were the only Middle Asian women out of 86 female Heroes of the USSR, and among 96 Heroes of the USSR from Kazakhstan. In the Soviet period everyone from Kazakhstan was proud for them, and in the first years of sovereignty the Monument was built in their honour at the Old Square of Almaty, instead of the Lenin's Monument. The images of two young girls hold the honourable place in the nation-buildup of the sovereign Kazakhstan.

The especial actuality has the discussion on hijabs, confirming the growth of some definite moods. The Muslim dress-code becomes the cause of scandal in the schools of Shymkent (Southern Kazakhstan) and Atyrau State University (Western Kazakhstan). In March, 2011, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev made himself definite in regard of this problem: «I am absolutely against wearing abaya, especially when abaya or hijab is worn by female students. We never experienced it in our history, our religion never had such tradition. One has to know how to distinguish the real religion from the obtruded one». In August he was supported by the Head of the newly founded Agency on the religious affairs Kairat Lama Sharif and the Head of the Muslim Administration Absattar Derbisali. Afterwards, on October 23, 2011, the winners of the contest of Muslim costumes in Kazakh style were honoured in the Baluan Sholak's Sports Palace organized by the Muslim Administration of Kazakhstan [9].

Nevertheless, the concern of Kazakhstan' leaders is caused not by hijabs but by the growing islamization of the country. The authorities of Kazakhstan declare the importance of fight with the non-traditional interpretation of Islam. The Mazhilis' deputy (lower chamber of the Parliament) Kamal Burkhanov was the first representative of the Parliament who officially opposed the obtrusion of wearing hijabs. In the meeting of the Public Chamber of Mazhilis while discussing the draft Law On Religious activities and Religious Entities professor K.Burkhanov was very straight about his opinion on religion and islamization of public life: «... the culture of our ancestors cannot be changed. Do not run between the culture of Kazakhs and culture of Arabs. Forcing young women to put on hijab, one should remember that never Kazakh women wore hijabs. How could she wear it in the Spartan, nomadic conditions? She was wearing pantaloons, she was horse-riding, she could handle easily with horses. A woman was busy with family, children and housekeeping, sharing all of the difficulties of nomadic life with her man» [10].

The history of Kazakh people obviously indicates, that in Kazakh society a woman is first of all Mother, keeper of the

heart and home, and the honoured and respected personality, who never was treated with indignity. K.Burkhanov pointed out that the Kazakh men, representing different clans, were always unified as if cemented with golden fittings of unity of Kazakh ethnoses, by a Kazakh woman.

Hijabs and abayas are just attributes, bearing mostly from the state point of view the protest character. Hijab from the wardrobe element had turned into some kind of symbol, causing the absolutely discrepant attitude and becoming the cause of significantly serious social and political collisions in Europe as well as in the post-Soviet territories.

As per Elena Gapova, «the control over the female body is the control over the personal life and private space, as well as the mean of guarantee of political loyalty and part of the system of total political control». The control of society over the female body is seen in the categorical imperative «what a woman should be». The nationalistic discourse uses the representations of female bodies in order to have control over the national and community borders [10].

The gender component in the national project of Kazakhstan assumes the contradistinction to the obsolete, Soviet one. The very illustrative indication is the comparison of the female position in Soviet and post-Soviet periods. According to the philosopher and publicist V.Tuleshev in his work «What is the code of Kazakhs?», published in «CentralAsiaMonitor» weekly newspaper № 30 (189) dated July 25, 2008, «the great metamorphosis» occurred to Kazakhstan' women with the coming of Soviet power: «The image of a weak and non-persistent oriental woman appeared in Kazakh literature in Soviet period. To my opinion it was the integral part of the wide campaign, oriented on belittling of the meaning of the Turk culture and Turk peoples in the history of the continent and, in particular, in the history of Russian empire, and later of the Soviet Union». He comes to the interesting conclusion, that the basis of the national idea of Kazakhstan should be the gender equality. His arguments are: «The Kazakhs never, despite any troubles, left without attention their women, whose spouses had died or were imprisoned, they never left the women on their own. Today the time has come to raise from the knees, to glorify the Kazakh woman, to canonize her best historical and cultural qualities, moral aspects and her modern rich civilized image. Particularly in the democratic way, in the special attitude of the Kazakhs and Kazakh society to a woman, I see, for example, the way of formation in the society of democratic values, of rooting, if applicable, of non-European standards of gender equality, and in general - of social life. In other words, the key to the achievement of rights and liberties in the Kazakh society is in the attitude towards a woman, whom we have to glorify and emblazon as the Kazakhs not by the historical honour but by the definition. And that's where, I assume, is the cypher of the secret code of the Kazakhs».

Under the code of each people, V.Tuleshev understands the entire moral, cultural and historical experience of the ethnoses. Every new generation of the ethnoses decrypts such a code, using the knowledge and culture, transmitted to it by the previous generation. The new generations bring up more or less of the investments to the code, making it more complex.

The Kazakhs, according to V.Tuleshev, have the code in their attitude to a woman, Mother and Homeland.

## II. CONCLUSION

Hereby, in the period of construction of its independence the new state uses the symbolic resources of the formation of the gender component in the national project. The mass culture actively participates in this process, where the reconstruction of the definitions of «male-female» directly affects the form and meaning of the national idea, on the visual images of its representation. The presented gender images act as the cultural codes with the important ideological function. The definition of the terms «feminine» and «masculine» includes inevitably the numerous definitive rows and archetypes, forming the basic concepts of the nation and national woman. The struggle for what such a woman should be - is the struggle for what the nation should become. And the discussion on hijab - is not just the discussion on the control over the female body, it's the discussion on the metaphor of the social order.

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