

## ABSTRACT

**of the dissertation by Bolysbayeva Ainura Kanapieвна on the topic "Religious Identity of Muslim Women of Kazakhstan," submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the specialty "6D020600 – Religious Studies."**

**General description of the work.** The dissertation examines the issue of the religious identity of Muslim women in Kazakhstan through religious studies, sociological, and historical analysis, with a focus on women engaging in religious practices.

**Relevance of the study.** Kazakhstan is currently experiencing a religious revival, which is primarily manifested in Islamic revivalism. Since the 1990s, the number of mosques in the country has increased 58 times, and population census data show that the majority of citizens continue to identify themselves as Muslims.

The study of the formation of Islamic identity is one of the most important tasks in the social and humanitarian sciences. At the same time, the importance of studying gender aspects of Muslim identity, particularly female religiosity, is growing. This is due, firstly, to the status of women as mothers—the primary agents of socialization for future generations, transmitting their religious experience to their children. Secondly, compared to Muslim men, actively practicing Muslim women more often demonstrate their religiosity through their external appearance (hijab, headscarf, etc.).

In public discourse, national and religious clothing are often contrasted with each other, leading to comparisons and contradictions between Kazakh and Islamic (Arab) styles of dress, which contributes to the spread of negative stereotypes about religious attire.

Furthermore, it should be noted that radicalization processes among women are intensifying. Representatives of non-traditional religious groups raise their children within a destructive ideology, while wives of those convicted of religious extremism maintain their husbands' connections with radical communities. Some women join the ranks of ISIS\*, form families with militants, provide support on the battlefield (working as cooks, nurses, etc.), engage in recruiting new members, and contribute to the spread of terrorist ideology.

Given the aforementioned issues, the study of the formation and development of Islamic identity among women is of particular relevance.

**Degree of research on the topic.** Since the issue of Islamic identity is one of the most relevant, several researchers have turned their attention to this subject. The Islamic identity of women has been studied in the academic sphere by international scholars such as L. Ahmed, L. Abu-Lughod, A. Wadud, H. Moghissi, A. Barlas, S. Mahmood, S. Benhabib, N. Golley, N. Tohidi, F. Mernissi, F. El Guindi, D. Kandiyoti, and others.

In the Soviet academic tradition, women's Islamic religiosity within the framework of atheistic ideology was examined by researchers such as M. Vagabov, E. Pritchina, I. Kryvelev, B. Palvanova, V. Lysenko, and others.

Among Russian researchers, women's religiosity within the framework of Islam has been studied by G. Baltanova, G. Baraeva, G. Sabirova, I. Kuznetsova-Morenko, L. Salakhutdinova, Y. Gureeva, and others.

Kazakhstani scholars studying Islamic identity include N. Baitenova, E. Burova, A. Kurmanalieva, D. Kenzhetay, B. Satershinov, N. Seytakhmetova, G. Solovyova, A. Kosichenko, Sh. Rysbekova, S. Abzhalov, N. Nurtazina, K. Borbassova, K. Zatov B. Beysenov, K. Tazhikova, T. Kozyrev, E. Baydarov, A. Abuov, M. Bektenova, Zh. Kabidenova, K. Zholdybayuly, Z.G. Zhalilova, A. Adilbayev, A. Muminova, A. Saylaubekkizy, G. Dosanova, and others. This issue, as a symbiosis of cultural and Muslim identity, has been examined by domestic scholars such as A. Nysanbayev, T. Gabitov, N. Nurmuratov, G. Yesim, S. Bolekbayev, G. Nurysheva, A. Kulsariyeva, A. Masalimova, M. Shaykemelov, T. Orynbekov, A. Smirnov, Z. Kodar, E. Ongarov, and others.

At the same time, the religious identity of women in a historical context is reflected in the works of N. Nurtazina, I. Stasevich, and Sh. Adilbayeva. In the political discourse, this issue was studied in the works of T. Kozyrev.

The issue of the feminization of extremism has been addressed by scholars such as O. Abdellatif, M. Ottaway, P. Scholk, D. Cook, K. von Knop, M. Bloom, E. Saltman, M. Smith, V. Markovic, A. Spencer, J. Cook, G. Vale, Ch. Orozbekova, A. Speckhard, E. Karin, A. Abdrasilkyzy, G. Baltanova, T. Dronzina, J. Davis, and others.

**Research objective:** To study the features of the formation of religious identity among Muslim women in modern Kazakhstan.

To achieve this objective, the following **tasks** were set during the research:

- Examine the phenomenon of religious identity, including Islamic identity.
- Analyze the main conceptual approaches to studying the religiosity of Muslim women.
- Study the aspects of religiosity of women in traditional Kazakh society.
- Identify the types of Islamic identity among women in the post-secular Kazakhstani society and the reasons for their formation.
- Explore the process of the feminization of extremism using the example of women repatriated during the "Zhusan" special operation.
- Determine the reasons why women lead a religious lifestyle (wear hijab, pray, fasting, etc.).
- Forecast the prospects and risks for the future development of Islamic identity among women and search for ways to address these challenges.

**The object of the research** is Muslim women.

**The subject of the research** is the study of the process of forming the religious identity of Muslim women.

**Scientific novelty of the research:**

- An author's classification of religiosity was proposed based on an analysis of existing scientific classifications of religiosity. The group of atheists was excluded from this classification, as it was based on the presence of religious belief. Consequently, religious individuals were divided into five groups according to their level of faith: fanatics, actively religious, moderately religious, passively religious, and those oscillating between belief and disbelief (agnostics).

- Based on archival photographs of women, a sociological analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Islam and rituals in traditional Kazakh society. As

a result, an expert evaluation was provided on the contentious societal issue regarding the hijab and traditional national attire.

- A sociological survey was conducted to determine the level of religiosity among Muslim women in Kazakhstan. The study described the connection between performing religious practices and the respondents' self-identification based on five "dimensions" of religious participation: ideological (content of faith), ritual (traditions and practices), experiential (personal religious experience), intellectual, and the manifestation of religiosity in secular life.

- In-depth interviews were conducted with women who actively practice religion, allowing for an exploration of the main reasons for turning to religion from the perspective of actors and insiders.

- In the process of analyzing the phenomenon of the feminization of extremism, a secondary analysis was conducted of interviews with women from Kazakhstan who went to Syria to join ISIS, as well as media reports about them. A socio-psychological profile of women prone to radical views and ideas was then created.

- The author has divided the process of women's radicalization into stages:

The first stage — the emergence of initial interest in religion.

The second stage — the beginning of radicalization (causes may include revenge, retribution, kinship, respect, violence).

The third stage — internalization of radical ideas, the desire to live in a theocratic state based on Sharia law, as well as intolerance towards people with differing views and hostility towards the secular structure of the state.

The fourth stage — life in Syria.

- The future of women's Islamic religiosity, including potential threats, was analyzed, and scientific forecasts were made.

#### **The main scientific conclusions presented for defense:**

1. Gender aspects of Islamic religious identity are considered a relevant issue and are comprehensively studied within the framework of social sciences and humanities such as religious studies, sociology, philosophy, history, and psychology. In particular, within the social-philosophical discourse, the direction of Islamic feminism, which examines women's religiosity from the actor's perspective, provides an opportunity for a deeper analysis of this issue.

2. The formation of religiosity among Kazakhstani Muslim women takes place at the intersection of Turkic, traditional Kazakh, and contemporary Kazakhstani cultures, as well as Islamic civilization. Therefore, when examining the processes of formation and development of Islamic religiosity among women in our country, it is essential to consider the characteristics of the national culture.

3. In modern Kazakhstan, among Muslim women, a significant number of passive Muslims and moderately religious individuals can be identified, according to our authorial classification. This is due to the fact that full adherence to religious norms (five daily prayers, fasting, wearing the hijab, paying zakat, etc.) requires considerable time resources and is accompanied by numerous restrictions. Additionally, the dominance of this group can be explained by historical reasons, such as the entrenchment of atheistic ideology during the Soviet period.

4. Among religiously active women, certain differences in the practice of religious rituals can be observed. These distinctions are influenced by both objective factors (such as age, ethnicity, and level of education) and subjective reasons (such as temperament and psychological characteristics).

5. Currently, there are processes of radicalization among women. The channels of radicalization include family, social networks, the internet, and social contacts. It has been established that women with social problems (unemployed, with low income, poor material conditions, etc.) or those experiencing psychological difficulties (a sense of uncertainty, stigmatization, susceptibility to the influence of others' opinions) most often join extremist groups.

6. It can be assumed that in the future, the level of Islamic religiosity, including the proportion of actively religious individuals, will rise. This is due, first, to the process of religious revival that has been ongoing in the country for decades, and second, to the prevalence of large religious families and raising children according to Islamic norms. However, the rise in religiosity will not reach a level that threatens the secular nature of the state.

7. In the future, it can be assumed that active religiosity among women will transform under the influence of urbanization and the development of the internet space. In particular, this will be characterized by the spread of a "modernized" urban form of Islam among women, an increase in the number of Muslim women's communities, the emergence of various online courses aimed at this social group, and the growing popularity of Islamic coaches and psychologists among religious women.

8. If a ban on wearing religious clothing in public places is introduced in the future, it may force women wearing the hijab to choose between their religious and professional status. This, in turn, could lead to their social isolation and segregation.

9. Currently, there is a trend in the public space of opposing religious and national cultures. To address this issue, it is suggested to promote traditional Kazakh women's attire, such as the kimeshek, which aligns with hijab standards. This would be an excellent way to integrate religious and national identities.

#### **The theoretical and methodological foundation of the dissertation research.**

The theoretical foundation of the dissertation research is based on the normative legal acts and laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of religious policy, national programs and strategies of Kazakhstan, the Quran, works of researchers in the field of religion and social sciences, as well as online resources.

**The methodological foundation of the study** is based on phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches, as well as comparative, typological, and historical methods.

**The empirical basis of the study** consists of sociological methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews.

**The theoretical and practical significance of the research.** The study conducted a comprehensive analysis of Islamic religiosity among women. Based on the obtained data, the levels of women's religiosity, the motives for choosing a religious lifestyle, and the reasons for radicalization were identified. The results can be used as a methodological resource for humanitarian research in the fields of religious studies, cultural studies, and philosophy.

The results of the work can serve as a foundation for fundamental and applied research in religious studies. The materials of the dissertation can be applied in the development of programs aimed at improving the methodological tools for forecasting state policy, as well as in the creation of new specialized courses in religious studies and the preparation of textbooks and scientific works for the educational process.

**The approval of the research results.** The main results of the dissertation research are presented in 11 publications, of which 2 articles were published in scientific journals indexed in the Scopus database, 3 articles in scientific journals recommended by the Committee for Control of Education and Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1 article in the bulletin of the Religious Studies series of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and 5 articles in the proceedings of international conferences, one of which was published abroad.

**Structure of the dissertation.** The dissertation consists of an introduction, three sections comprising eight chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and one appendix.