DEGREE OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT: IMPACTS ON WOMEN'S LIFESTYLE (CASE OF MUSLIM FEMALE CITIZENS OF THE TOWN OF ZHANAOZEN)

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Abstract - Considering Kazakh women, who manifests a different level of commitment to religion, it seems they translate their religious believes in a wide range of spectrum. The present study was designed to examine how level of religiosity influences lifestyle of women. With this objective, questionnaires and interviews were used to observe local and national dynamics of ethnic Muslim women living in Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan together with their personal evaluation of individual preferences, social position, and networks. Taking its current shape due to historical prerequisites, and current developments, Islam here is presented as an integral part to ethnic identity of its female citizens.

Keywords - Religiosity, Believes, Ethnic Muslim, Women, Impact, Social Life, Lifestyle

I. INTRODUCTION

One way to understand the role of religion is a sociological analysis:(A.Sultangaliyeva[1]) how women assess the role of religion in personal life and in society. Using this approach it is possible to trace the mutual influence of religious and social in its various manifestations, because among women no clear opinion exists about the role of religion. This work, through the analysis of women's representations of the role of religion in various spheres of lifestyle investigates the degree of its impact and identifies the role of religion in women's lives. Analysis of the social status of women based on the use of principles of system ideas about the subject and object of research, the principle of continuity, the interdependence of general and special subject to nationally specific conditions of the country. It was assumed from the concept of the gender approach, which represents gender as a category of social (hierarchical) order.(Kh. Khushkadamova[2])The study rests upon the collective practice of the studied totality from the position of its culture, the strategy of interaction with it, as well as the position of the author, which is based on "immersion" in the study environment. The intensity of the processes occurring in the religious sphere, the local specifics of the changes, the diversity of forms in which religious attitudes are implemented, allow within the boundaries of the designated topic to make one of the many casts of the multifaceted and contradictory picture of women's social life.

II. ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

2.1 Social and Demographical Characteristics of Respondents

Study was conducted with female citizens of Zhanaozen in the period from July to August 2017. During this time 100 were surveyed and 15 of them were interviewed. Respondents to questionnaires and interviews were found through private contacts with women using "snowball" technique. The survey included women aged 18 to 61 and older. Among them predominantly women aged 21-30 and 31-40 (47% and 27% respectively), a little less share of women of 41-50 age (16%). Relatively a small share of respondents are in the age of 18-20 and 51 and older. Majority of respondents have higher or incomplete higher education 71%, women with secondary education are 22%. The share of women with no education is very small, and mostly consists of returnees from Turkmenistan (interviews with Kh. and B.[3]), who arrived in Zhanaozen in adulthood as well as young local women who got married early, often immediately right after high school. But still taking into account modern social and economic situation many, it would be said majority of women in their labor ages have at least diplomas of secondary education.

Ethnically, all respondents are Kazakhs (should be noted Kazakhs make up 98,52% of the total population of the city). (Committee for Statistics of Ministry of National Economy of RoK[4]) Slightly more than a half of respondents are married (47%), single are 35%, several percentages of divorcees and widows present (12% and 6%, respectively). The majority of informants are local residents (77%), the rest migrated mostly from Turkmenistan, less from Russia or other cities of Kazakhstan. Currently, 78% of the respondents are working.

2.2 Unfolding of Religious Consciousness

Based on the significance of the nominal religiosity of believers (criterion of self-identity(Pankov[5])) using a 10-point scale respondents relate themselves to medium - and deeply religious people, because none of them was chosen points 1-3. What the respondents mean under the notion of religiosity will be discussed further.

For our study, it is more appropriate to group low, medium, and deeply religious women, referring to degree of performance religious prescriptions and spirituality. Due to the fact that women are Muslim by birth, they consider themselves to some extent religious. To determine the degree of religiosity respondents were posed an additional question about the role of religion in their lives. 82% of respondents in one way or another noted the importance of religion in their lives (35% "very important", 47% – "rather important"), 8% of women do not attach importance to this question, 8% undecided. In the group, who gives the importance of religion, 30% were young women aged 21-30 years and 46% aged 31-40. Less importance give to religion women aged 41-50 (25%), and67% of women in the age of 51-60 noted the religion is very important for them. To evaluate sincerity of respondents, among 35% of women, who believe religion is very important in their lives was calculated that 24% of those women pray 5 times a day; 12% pray 1-2 time a day; 53% don't pray now, but plan or want in the near future. So, 6% who stated that religion is very important for them fail to see it as a necessity to pray as they either are not interested or do not know prayer (e.g. all the prayers are in Arabic language).

Also, interesting are the results of those 47%, who said religion is rather important for them. Among them still present are women who pray 5 times a day (4%) and 1-2 times (again, 4%). Majority of them plan or want to pray in the near future (74%). The rest 13% do not know prayer or not interested in praying. 50% of women who not attach any importance to religion in their lives don't pray, but want or plan to do it in the near future. Accordingly, the rest 50% are not interested in praying. There is no rule when women start to pray and do it regularly. They are women from 19-22 to 59. 96% of respondents in their close environment have people, who are close to religion. Among them husband and his relatives 18%, respondents' parents and grandparents 29%, other relatives 45%, and a small percentage have religious friends 4%. Zhanaozenhas three mosques located in various parts of the city for convenience, therefore, we cannot say that women have any difficulties to go to the mosque; here it mainly depends on their personal choice. At the same time, for women in Islam, unlike men, there is no obligation of regular visits to the mosque. Women can do it on her own will, with her own motives, sometimes just to give alms to the needy or the mosque. This leaves us with only 2% attending the mosque every week, one quarter once a month or once in six months, while more than half (55%) go to the mosque once a year or less. 18% of these women state that they never visit mosques.

Regarding religious practices (rites, religious reading, etc.) almost half of the respondents said that such religious traditions exist in their families (for example, fasting, sacrifice on KurbanAit, giving sadaqat and zakat). 33 percent of women reported that such traditions exist, but they place little importance to them and only 18 percent replied that they have no religious traditions in their families.

Why do respondents observe religious rites and traditions? 33 percent of the women in the study think that it is the basis and a requirement in being part of Islam and thus, they do it with pleasure. 22%believe that it is a requirement and the basis of national features (because they are Kazakh, and Kazakh being largely Muslim, they also need to be Muslims). 24%observe rites thinking that it will help them before Allah (does this mean they will lead better lives and have much abundant blessings?). A small percentage of women observe rites as it is customary in their families (4%), the same percentage do not want to comply with all canons, but have to do that to avoid problems with family, husband, or relatives.

A few clarifying questions were asked to grasp what components of religious traditions are most observed among respondents. Small percentages celebrate all religious holidays according to the religious calendar on a regular basis (10%).The highest percentage (73%) said they celebrate only the most famous ones. Fourteen percent say they celebrate religious holidays rarely. And only 2% reported they don't celebrate religious holidays at all. So, it was necessary to find out if women divide national and religious holidays. As it turned out, more than half of the respondents correctly listed national and religious holidays (59%), while 10% were confused in answering this question, mixing religious with the national, 6% recalled only a small number of holidays, and 22% of women are undecided.

When choosing clothes, slightly more than half of the respondents do not connect their appearance with religious prescriptions (53%), while a more categorical 12% of respondents always choose clothes that are not contrary to religious norms. The 27%, meanwhile are in the middle, meaning, their preference of clothing are usually guided by religious norms, but can buy a thing despite the inconsistency to religious norms, if they like that thing much.

To the question about motivation of prayer, women (33%) indicated that they pray for meditation and psychological reasons, meaning to calm down their nerves. Requests to God for not to leave them and their family members during prayer are normally delivered by 52% of the women.

What does religion mean for respondents? Many respondents (40%) have pointed to moral principles as a defining component of religious identity. The second place is occupied by ceremonies, the third share common historical past (from the perspective of ethnic history) and psychology. As the question of knowledge of doctrinal beliefs, 40% of respondents are familiar with the basic statements of doctrine. Many respondents have knowledge about holidays (29%), ceremonies (14%), prayer (10%), history of creeds (3%), and biography of the Prophet (5%). The

obtained data indicate a low level of awareness in Islamic doctrine among believers.

2.3 Image of Society and Family Behavior as a Component of Women's Religiosity

In evaluating the overall sociability of the respondents, the survey revealed the top 3 in terms of preference of communication: 1) all people (30%), 2) neighbors (26%), 3) familiar people, and people from their environment (20%). Further, usually follows "children" (12%); people of the same nationality (8%); colleagues, peers, random interlocutors mentioned by 4%; and the least popular communication by gender (1% willing to contact with the opposite sex, 5% prefer with communicate with women).

The motives of communication for most are dictated by religious, domestic, ethnic, and social reasons, women cannot be called closed for communication. The ethnic factor does not play a big role in the selection of contacts, as representatives of the same nation are in majority. The strive for communication with children is present in all age groups, but increases with the ageing of the respondents. In the matter of visiting public places, 55% of respondents feel no embarrassment and open for visiting public sauna, disco, or bar, while 31% are against this form of leisure.

More than fifty percent (69%) of respondents acknowledge the legal equality of men and women. 14% disagree, while some of respondents say their decision making power is largely influenced by the position in the family (from being grandmothers, wives, to sisters, to aunts, etc). The belief in legal equality of men and women does not interfere with 81% of respondents say that in their purchases they are sure to consult with my husband. From the interviews the higher religiosity of the respondents, the more they turn for advice, more obedient to their husbands.

Several respondents in their interview to the question of having religious advisor said "I cannot rely on words of such people, because they might have different opinions. I can ask two of them, then read religious books and only after that decide by myself". And the second woman: "Religion is a very fragile thing, the line where is right or wrong is too thin. I heard about cases in our city when young women were attracted to extremist flows"(Interviews with Zh. And B.[6]). These women are relatively young (28-30), literate enough in the religious issues, in the future willing to perform all 5 pillars of Islam, but, at the same time, are not too strict in following religious prescriptions in their clothing. With the time women, often, become more religious. From the words of one respondent "after going to retirement, my mother became able to devote herself to religion. She started to pray several times a day".(Interview with N.[7]).

III. DISCUSSIONS

The survey indicated that generally, for questioned women being Muslim is a part of an individualization adjusted to a modern reality and expressed with a different intensity, depending on the individual. For respondents in family, friend's circle, society belonging to Islam perceived as granted. We can talk about a noticeable impact of close environment on religious beliefs of Muslim women. However, in an interview informants most often said about religiosity of not parents, but grandparents or other relatives. So, we could observe an interruption of religious traditions in the families. A new generation of Muslim women are often "self-converted", as they made the conscious choice in favor of Islam. When interviewed in no case they question the value of family and relationships with the older generation, but produce their own versions of behavior that would fit modern society.

The growth of religiosity among women is primarily due to the complexity of reality, the accelerated pace of life, increasing demands in the professional field, weakening of moral conduct of society and, as a consequence, the search for psychological protection and support of religion. The reasons for the growth of religion should be sought through psychological mechanisms and in order to gain spirituality.

While, respondents stated conscious identification with Islam, their attitude to religious practice varies widely. The Muslim community as a common cultural denominator is not uniform and not static. The local form of Islam in each case has an individual dimension of the life of the respondents. Owing to secular character of religion in the country, women, mostly, can choose to extend religiosity in such a way that it will impact their lives positively. Research indicated three types of Muslim women in the research area: 1) Islam not recognized by respondents as something unique, but rather natural, customary, traditional, i.e., "experienced" more quietly. It can be due to less active nature of Islam itself, which has survived the period of Soviet atheism and probably the lack of sharp public debate over the legal status of Muslims in a secular society; 2) women, who pursue spirituality and morals, perform religious prescriptions to some extent, for example by fasting and praying, behavioral patterns. Although having knowledge of the creed, they are free in choosing what to wear, e.g. they adapt Islam to their own needs and to secular environment; 3) And, what has now become a tendency or "fashion", if we can call so among Kazakh women that Islam is growing in influence among them, especially young women, they try to practice all the prescriptions, and wear according to religion requirements (long loose clothes with scarf and long sleeves), which can be considered as religious "markers".

Survey data and interviews showed that the majority of respondents create and legitimize moral code, modify the cultural and religious patterns, interpret in a new fashion traditional values according to the demands of modernity, adapting religious practice to their own needs. However, it is impossible to overstate the magnitude of technology and modernization. Many believers still hold on to traditional views.

"In the modern individualized world, the meaning-making function of religion acquires special significance: increasingly raises the importance of emotional religious experience; religious practice secularities, reducing the number of practicing rituals. Thus, emotional relationship to God legitimizes the modification and modernization of religious practice. Here there is a marked interdependence between the subjective religiosity and its ability to harmonize Muslim norms and requirements of modern society. As practice shows, only those who are able to reflect about their religiosity, to establish the subjective relationship between personal faith and the world are able to compete in a social environment, overcoming the challenges of today's world. Subjective religiousness increases the integrative ability of the individual"(S. Ryazanova, A.Mikhaleva[9]).

CONCLUSION

Religious believers can be translated to women not only through parents or grandparents, but also thorough close environments, like friends and colleagues. Mostly for Zhanaozen female citizens religion is not a lifestyle but rather a support or some kind of asylum to overcome the hardships of being, women who seek for spirituality often turn to religion.

Among women Islam is practicing in three ways:

1) who consider themselves by the fact of birth (ethnic Muslims) and don't think to prove it by other means; 2) who believe spiritually, perform religious prescriptions, but don't signalize about their belonging by so called religious 'markers'; 3) who perform religious prescriptions and underline it by the means of Islamic attributes.

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