

Bolshevik Modernity in Collision with Islamic Culture: Representations of Exclusiveness in the Soviet “Orient”

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RESÜMEE

Die Bolschewiki versuchten in den zwanziger und dreißiger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts, die analphabetische Bevölkerung des sowjetischen Imperiums durch Praktiken der zeremoniellen Pädagogik zu erreichen und zu disziplinieren. Voraussetzung aller Integration aber war die Indigenisierung der lokalen Herrschaftsverhältnisse. Sie führte zu einer kulturellen Nationsbildung, die am Ende in einen Konflikt mit der sozialistischen Ordnungsstrategie geriet. Als die Bolschewiki im Kaukasus und in Zentralasien damit begannen, die lokalen Gesellschaften durch Erziehungskampagnen zu verändern, wurden die nationalen Eigenschaften der lokalen Gesellschaften in Frage gestellt. Der Konflikt um Souveränität und Deutungshoheit entzündete sich an der Frage, welche Funktion die Frauen in der neuen Gesellschaft spielen sollten. Sie sollten befreit werden, sagten die Bolschewiki. Sie sollten bleiben, was sie waren, sagten die Dorfbewohner, weil bolschewistische Frauen aufgehört hätten, Muslime zu sein. Der Tschador wurde zum symbolischen Streitobjekt der Kontrahenten, und in der Auseinandersetzung wurde er für die einen zu einem Symbol der Rückständigkeit und für die anderen ein Symbol nationaler Eigenständigkeit. In z. T. dramatischer Zuspitzung demonstrieren die Ereignisse im sowjetischen Orient, wie Repräsentationen die Welt nicht nur abbilden, sondern sie so verändern, daß nichts mehr ist wie zuvor.

On the night of September 8, 1925, in an *aul* (village) in the district of Dzharkent in Kyrgyzstan a murder took place which might have occurred in any other region of the Soviet East at that time: two members of the community strangled their sister-in-law for her refusal after her husband's death to marry his older brother as was plainly the

custom.¹ The *aul's* inhabitants kept silent about the deed and the elders – who also controlled the local soviet – were rewarded by the murderers for their silence with a gift of a camel and a horse. The dead woman was hurriedly buried and spoken of no more. It was as if she had never lived.

Eventually, however, the authorities learned of what had occurred and in early October 1925 an investigative commission of the GPU appeared in the *aul*. The murderers and their accessories were arrested and brought before a court. Shortly afterwards the GPU's leadership in Moscow took up the case, albeit with an unconventional interpretation. The head of the GPU's information department, Georgii Evgen'evich Prokof'ev, did not see murderers who needed to be called to account under criminal law for their deed; he instead saw class enemies who assaulted women who were enslaved and deprived of their rights. "If a woman will not agree to marry a *bey*, then without much ado she gets a rope around her neck and it's off to the grave for her."

The perpetrators had only remained unpunished because the "power of the *bey's*" held sway in the *aul*. This power must be broken to prevent "such cases happening again," Prokof'ev added.² The GPU thus intended not just to punish the murderers and their protectors, it wished to be rid of them and the representations by which the perpetrators rationalized and justified their violence.

This statement was evidently nothing unusual for the GPU's leadership: in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Adzharistan, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus too members of the secret police worked on bringing such crimes to light. Where women were kidnapped or murdered and where underage girls were married off, where polygamy, bride money (*kalym*) and alien rules on clothing symbolized the relationship between the sexes, the agents of the secret police immediately became active. In 1925 alone, dozens of reports were compiled in the GPU's Moscow headquarters on "crimes against the socialist way of life".³ What in the Soviet Union's European regions would have been a case for the criminal police was treated as a political crime in the Soviet East. For the communists from the centre, the murder of a Kyrgyz woman was a counterrevolutionary act, a deed perpetrated by class enemies against oppressed women. This was why a woman's murder became a matter for the political police. But for the local society too there was more at stake here than first seemed the case: the elders, who were supposed to represent the interests of government power in the *aul*, took the side of the perpetrators, while all the other inhabitants of the nomadic settlement said nothing. Through their collective silence concerning the murder the *aul's* inhabitants made it plain to the Bolsheviks that they did not

1 This is the English version of an article already published in German as: Jörg Baberowski, Repräsentationen der Ausschließlichkeit. Kulturrevolution im sowjetischen Orient, in: Jörg Baberowski/Hartmut Kaelble/Jürgen Schriewer (eds), Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder. Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel, Frankfurt a. M./New York 2008, pp. 119-137.

2 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii [Russian State Historical Archive, subsequently referred to as: RGASPI], Fond 17, opis' 10, delo 138, p. 45.

3 Ibid., pp. 5-51. Cf. on this point for general information Jörg Baberowski, Der Feind ist überall. Stalinismus im Kaukasus, Munich 2003, and also Douglas Northrop, Veiled Empire. Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia, Ithaca, N.Y. 2004.

wish the government to get involved in their affairs. They demonstrated their sovereignty and cultural autonomy in relation to the communists from the city. The murderers had done more than merely kill a disobedient woman, the “eternal” rules structuring life in the *aul* had also been re-established on their account.

This confrontation evinced less of Islam and old traditions than might have been presumed from the perpetrators’ self-presentation. But nor were the Bolsheviks fighting for communism here, despite their rhetoric giving the impression that the cultural revolution in the East was a crusade for socialism. From this perspective, the dispute over the perpetrators’ punishment was an argument over cultural sovereignty of interpretation. The sole victor in this dispute would be the one who made the other silent, thereby overcoming his own speechlessness. Opponents thus became others, in responding to the changes which had taken place in their world.

For the Bolsheviks, the point was for their worldview to become everyone’s worldview. This was why they not only had to punish the murderers but also eliminate those who represented and justified the murder with an appeal to tradition. The murderers and their helpers also sought acknowledgement – by flinging their interpretation of the world at the Bolsheviks and thus reinventing themselves as custodians of apparently old customs. Through resistance against others murders thus became “eternal” traditions.

What was one’s own and what was other? How could one’s own kind be distinguished from others? In the present case, the answer was the relationship between the sexes and the cultural orders in which men and women moved. For both sides, women became a symbol of “true” life and the woman’s representation reflected the combatants’ identity. For this reason, the cultural revolution in the Soviet East was above all a confrontation over the “correct” way of life, which women were to vicariously exemplify for society at large.

How can the episode described above be made comprehensible for us and for others? What is a historian to make of it who wishes to do more than merely retell the contents of the documents? He might address material living conditions, geographical, climatic and economic circumstances so as to present historical individuals as creatures of their environment. But what would be the point of that? The world is not simply there, it is there only as a world which is comprehended and mediated. Reality is interpretation, and this interpretation refers to nothing but other interpretations. Man only ever has to do with various interpretations of the world, and within these interpretations with himself alone. Whatever he may do, the understanding of meaning figures in everything. We would have nothing to say to ourselves if our actions were not fraught with meaning, we would have to remain silent.⁴ But what we give one another to understand moves in networks of significance which are already there before one seeks to make oneself understandable – and to understand oneself. Clifford Geertz called this culture. Before

4 Ernst Cassirer, *Versuch über den Menschen. Einführung in eine Philosophie der Kultur*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990 [English edition: *An Essay on Man*, New Haven 1944], p. 50; Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981, pp. 178-180.

we understand how to do something, we have always already understood. One might say that it is not without preconditions that we are what we are. "It is always against a background of the *already begun* that man is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origin," as Foucault says.⁵ But not only do people live in a universe of significance, they also maintain a relationship with this universe. And they are challenged by others' interpretations. "All cultures are involved in one another."⁶ This is why they are not rigid and immutable copies of the world. Culture happens, it happens in a constant exchange with the worlds of meaning in which people move. If we were to live in sealed-off and rigid systems of meaning then we would no longer be able to communicate with others, we would discover no meaning in others' signs of life and lose our capacity for surprise. Everywhere where actions and interpretations take place is culture.

Our experiences are available to us only as we apprehend them, we understand the world by apprehending it. We simplify and order it lest sensory impressions overwhelm us, and it is only thus that we are capable as cultural beings of making this understanding of ours understandable for others. What for us no longer belongs to the realm which we take for granted, we ascribe to a culture: the culture of Muslims, Russians, workers etc. In defining others and inscribing them in seemingly unchanging cultures, we become conscious of ourselves as persons who are different. We are not ourselves from the outset, we become this only through rationalising our experiences of others. We become subjects by making others into others. We thus appropriate the world of others on our own terms. One might also say that stereotyping of one's environment is a function of the event of culture.⁷

However, historians cannot make do with imputing eternal qualities to cultures, as happens in everyday life. They cannot stubbornly remain deaf to the interpretations which are called out to them. To be sure, they too are speaking from a location in describing the lives of historical subjects – and thereby, above all, telling their readers about themselves – but they know that this is how things work. This is why cultural historians speak of the representations through which people communicate their worldviews but not of a world which lies hidden behind the communication. The "mirror of nature" has been shattered, and historians are instead merely concerned with the forms in which reality is presented, with representations.⁸

Representations are organisational forms of knowledge, symbols and rituals through which people apprehend the world. Description of the symbolic content of a representa-

5 Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung der Dinge. Eine Archäologie der Humanwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M. 1999 (15th edition), p. 398.

6 Edward W. Said, *Kultur und Imperialismus. Einbildungskraft und Politik im Zeitalter der Macht*, Frankfurt a. M. 1994 [English edition: *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1993], p. 30.

7 Oswald Schwemmer, *Die kulturelle Existenz des Menschen*, Berlin 1997, p. 137; Amin Maalouf, *Mörderische Identitäten*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000, p. 26 f.

8 Richard Rorty, *Der Spiegel der Natur. Eine Kritik der Philosophie*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981 [English edition: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton 1979]; Peter Burke, *Zwei Krisen des historischen Bewußtseins* in: Peter Burke (ed.), *Kultureller Austausch*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000, pp. 68-71; Eberhard Berg/Martin Fuchs (eds), *Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation*, Frankfurt a. M. 31999.

tion and analysis of a culture are performed in the same way as the reading of a text. As Clifford Geertz says, “Societies, like lives, contain *their own interpretation*. One has only to learn how to gain access to them.”⁹ In other words, it is the collective unconscious – the life which is admitted to habits and ways of speaking which we take for granted – that provides historians with their true impetus. It is only in the collective unconscious that the mentality of a human society becomes apparent.¹⁰ What is one’s own and what is other becomes visible at the borderlines between mentalities, where one no longer knows oneself to be in the realm of the self-evident. It is these borderlines which enable historians to describe culture and thus make visible perspectives which differ from their own worldview. This is also the case with the confrontation between the Bolsheviks and the inhabitants of the *aul* mentioned at the beginning of this text.

Bolshevism was a European project whose interpreters were drawn from the cities of European Russia. Lenin’s socialism was a synonym for the Europeanization of the old Russia, and in this sense it was an affair of intellectuals and educated city-dwellers who claimed to be speaking on behalf of workers. The Bolshevik leaders had only vague notions of peasant Russia and the Asian periphery of the empire and only after the revolution of 1917 did they come into contact with Muslims and nomads at all. Muslims and communists encountered one another as unknowns. But socialism as the Bolsheviks understood it – as a homogenous social order of “civilized” city-dwellers living in affluence – was a fiction. For what the Bolsheviks took to be a precondition for socialism existed neither in Russia nor at the periphery. The empire was socialism’s refutation, it was a perpetual challenge through which the Bolsheviks’ project had to prove itself. Revolutionaries who deemed cultural difference a potential threat were thus unable to overlook the empire’s heterogeneity.¹¹

When the Bolsheviks won back the multinational empire at the end of the civil war socialism was transformed into an imperial project, for the rulers as much as for their subjects. At the 8th party congress of the RCP in March 1919 Nikolai Bukharin, the European Bolsheviks’ leading theorist, had already stated that it was not the task of the revolution to classify its subjects in terms of national collectives. Such attributions were reasonable for “Hottentots, negroes, bushmen and Indians” at most, societies without social differentiation. But in Russia class had to prevail over the nation.¹²

9 Clifford Geertz, „Deep Play”: Bemerkungen zum balinesischen Hahnenkampf, in: Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*, Frankfurt a. M. 1994 [English edition: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York 1973], p. 260; Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die drei Sinnbildungsebenen der Geschichtsschreibung*, in: Klaus E. Müller/Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Historische Sinnbildung. Problemstellungen, Zeitkonzepte, Wahrnehmungshorizonte, Darstellungsstrategien*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1997, pp. 98–117, esp. p. 105.

10 Philippe Ariès, *Geschichte der Mentalitäten*, in: Jacques Le Goff/Roger Chartier/Jacques Revel (eds), *Die Rückeroberung des historischen Denkens. Grundlagen der Neuen Geschichtswissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, p. 162 f.

11 Terry Dean Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939*, Ithaca, N.Y. 2001; Gerhard Simon, *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion. Von der totalitären Diktatur zur nachstalinischen Gesellschaft*, Baden-Baden 1986; Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall* (footnote 3).

12 *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(B). Mart 1919 goda. Protokoly* [The Eighth Party Congress of the RCP. March 1919. Minutes], Moscow, 1959, p. 47.

Bukharin's reality was provided by the texts of Marxism; he understood the world surrounding him by calling to mind Marx's interpretation of the French Revolution. But these interpretations were challenged by the representations of others: during the civil war Lenin and his supporters found that the class model was an inadequate description of the realities in which their subjects lived. Polish and Finnish workers were proletarians, but they also saw themselves as Poles and Finns who did not associate the social conflict with the fate of the Bolshevik empire. Baku in 1918 saw bloody confrontations between Armenian and Turkish workers, in central Asia nomads were expelled by Russian settlers and workers, in Ukraine the peasant armies of the Whites and the Reds carried out pogroms of the Jews. At the fringes of the empire, in the Caucasus, in central Asia and in the western regions the Bolsheviks met with resistance not only from the adherents of the old regime. Wherever resistance appeared, it manifested itself collectively: in Baku the counterrevolution was a rebellion of Muslim city-dwellers, in the North Caucasus and in Georgia popular uprisings took place in the early 1920s and in central Asia Muslims and nomads rebelled against the Russian settlers and soldiers who had gained power in the soviets.¹³

For Stalin, Mikoyan, Kaganovich and all the Bolsheviks drawn from the multiethnic areas of the empire who were themselves members of an ethnic minority, the significance of a person's national identity was in any case never in doubt. For in their experience social conflicts had always also been ethnic in nature. Even for those Bolsheviks who assigned no significance at all to the national question this truth was unavoidable.

We have Bashkirs, Kyrgyz, a number of other peoples, and in our relationship with them we cannot deny them acknowledgment. We cannot deny this to any of the peoples living within the borders of the former Russian Empire, as Lenin shouted at his critics at the 8th party congress. Only "people without national characteristics" might make do without self-determination, "[b]ut such people do not exist."¹⁴

Every person belonged to a class and a nation. Stalin and the Bolshevik leaders from the provinces who assumed power in the party in the mid-1920s and transformed it into a multiethnic institution certainly did not doubt this. It was they who ethnicized the Soviet Union and transformed it into a state of nations where peoples lived not with but alongside one another. Stalin's "socialism in one country" was a socialism in nations. Revolutionaries seeking to stir class conflict and be rid of their supposed enemies had to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them by language and tradition. People understand one another through language, rituals and conventions. A person wishing to communicate something to others must adopt the language and habits of those whom

13 B. Bajkov, *Vospominaniia o revoliutsii v Zakavkaz'e (1917–1920 gg.)* [Memories of the Revolution in Transcaucasia], in: *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii* 9 (1923), pp. 91–194; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923*, Cambridge 1964; Adeeb Khalid, *Tashkent 1917: Muslim Politics in Revolutionary Turkestan*, in: *Slavic Review* 55 (1996), pp. 270–296; Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921*, Cambridge, Mass. 2002.

14 *Vos'moi s'ezd* (footnote 12), p. 53, 107. Cf. Alfred Rieber, *Stalin, Man on the Borderlands*, in: *American Historical Review* 106 (2001), pp. 1651–1691; Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 184–214.

he addresses. But the state of nations was also a representation of the dream of the modern world dreamed by Stalin and his entourage. They conceived a Soviet Union which matched their images of the world and gave it an order in which they recognized themselves.¹⁵

Its subjects now no longer lived in a multiethnic empire but in national republics and regions. They were governed in the name of their titular nation and in their native tongue, and they enjoyed privileges where they belonged to a “backward” nation. In short, not only did the natives belong to the party and state apparatuses, they were also granted privileges in the factories and universities where they belonged to a “backward” nation. “Putting down roots” (*korenizatsiia*) was the name the Bolsheviks gave to this strategy of indigenising socialism. In the Caucasus and in central Asia it served the goal of transforming “backward” peoples into modern nations and of communicating the socialist project in the language and traditions of the natives. But without the help of native interpreters the Bolsheviks at the centre would have been unable to realize any of their goals at the periphery. They would have remained mute and thus shared the fate of the tsar’s colonial officers in the Caucasus and central Asia.¹⁶

Indigenisation changed the imperial terms of communication. Between the Bolsheviks at the centre and the Islamic Enlightenment movement and national communists at the periphery a dialog unfolded on the possibilities for the Soviet education project in which the local elites who were to realize the centre’s programme in the villages ultimately also participated. But this dialog between communists and subjects proved to be a conversation between deaf-mutes for whom the other’s representation only ever confirmed the superiority of one’s own worldview. Yet the Bolsheviks had themselves empowered tradition by legitimating the customs of Muslims and nomads. One might also say that the Bolsheviks nationalized whatever they found to be backward.¹⁷ For the Tatar national communist Sultan-Galiev, the empire’s Muslims belonged to the proletarian peoples because they were oppressed by the colonial powers. He spoke of a “dictatorship of the

15 Terry Dean Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (footnote 11), pp. 2-25; Yuri Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or how a Socialist State Promotes Ethnic Particularism*, in: *Slavic Review* 53 (1994), pp. 414-452; Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide. Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton 2003, pp. 63-68; Jörg Baberowski, *Diktaturen der Eindeutigkeit*, in: Jörg Baberowski (ed.), *Krieg und Revolution im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2006.

16 Boris Zasukhin, *Po bol'shevistskij vziat'sia za korenizatsiiu gosudarstvennogo apparata* [We Attend to Putting Down Roots for the Apparatus of State in the Bolshevik Manner], in: *Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti* (1933) no. 12, pp. 73-75; S. Akopov, *K voprosu ob uzbekizatsii apparata i sozdanie mestnykh kadrov promyshlennosti Uzbekistana* [On the Question of the Uzbekization of the Apparatus and the Creation of Local Cadres in the Industry of Uzbekistan], in: *Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti* (1931) no. 12, p. 27 f.; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (footnote 11), pp. 125-146; Terry Dean Martin, *Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism*, in: Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism. New Directions*, London 2000, pp. 348-367; Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 314-349.

17 Douglas Northrop, *Nationalizing Backwardness: Gender, Empire, and Uzbek Identity*, in: Ronald Grigor Suny / Terry Dean Martin (eds), *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford 2001, pp. 191-222.

colonies and semi-colonies over the metropolis", by which he meant a privileging of the Islamic nations of the empire over its European ones.¹⁸

But Muslim peoples were not just proletarian peoples who were oppressed and exploited by colonial powers. They were "backward" because they lived in past centuries and adhered to outmoded traditions which were no longer in keeping with the modern world as the Bolsheviks understood it. It may appear paradoxical, but for the Bolsheviks too what a Kyrgyz or an Azerbaijani was manifested itself in the customs which they had declared backward: the way of life stipulated in the Koran, the separation of the sexes and the veiling of women.¹⁹ For the national communists and the Islamic Enlightenment movement too, the Muslims' customs were national representations. Communism did not contradict Islam, in fact it enabled the mullahs to interpret the teachings of the Koran in a new way, as the head of the government of Soviet Azerbaijan, Nariman Narimanov, declared in the early 1920s:

*Our mullah can be won over through references to the Koran, which does not contradict communism. If one obliges the mullah thus and tells him what communism means and explains this idea to him in the right way, he will himself believe: "Yes, that was written long ago."*²⁰

In the late 1920s the Bolsheviks would hear no more of such declarations of faith as they were put forward by the Muslim national communists in reference to the indigenisation of socialism. They now spoke of the Cultural Revolution and of new people and new ways of life. The Cultural Revolution created new people, established monopolies of representation and reduced competing interpretations to silence. It delegitimized others because it placed supposedly "old" and "uncivilized" ways of life at the empire's Islamic periphery under suspicion of barbarism. But the Bolsheviks not only thus dismantled their own nationalisation concept, they also deprived themselves of the indigenous communicators for their project of civilisation. For a Kyrgyz who was not a nomad and an Azerbaijani who was not a Muslim was no longer a Kyrgyz or Azerbaijani. This was the point made by Valerian Kuibyshev at a meeting of the central committee in June 1923 in stating that national characteristics would disappear if the Bolsheviks succeeded in overcoming the empire's social and cultural variety. "When there is no longer any inequality the Kyrgyz communist produced by this milieu will no longer speak specifically of the Kyrgyz, as all will be equal."²¹ The point was thus for the Muslims to banish Islam from their world and become sedentary and modern Europeans. The Muslims must be liber-

18 Quoted in: A. Arsharuni/Ch. Gabidullin, *Ocherki panislamizma i panturkizma v Rossii* [Characteristics of Panislamism and Panturkism in Russia], Moscow: Bezboznik, 1931, p. 78 f.

19 Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 34; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors. Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1994, pp. 187-246.

20 Nariman Narimanov, *Izbrannnye proizvedeniia* [Collected Works], vol. 2, 1918-1921, Baku 1989, p. 392.

21 *Tainy natsional'noi politiki TsK RKP. Stenograficheskii otchet sekretnogo IV soveshchaniia TsK RKP 1923 g.* [The Secrets of the Nationalities Policy of the Central Committee of the RCP. Stenographic Report on the Secret, Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee of the RCP in 1923], Moscow 1992, p. 26.

ated from “the pall of medieval culture”, as the national communist Safarov put it.²² The new person of whom the Bolsheviks spoke wore European clothing, subjected himself to the rhythm of modern working life and held religion in contempt. He could not be a Muslim. For this reason, the Cultural Revolution was a negation of national “putting down roots”.

In the Soviet East too, the Cultural Revolution was a fight for people’s souls. The aim of the Bolsheviks at the centre was to empty their subjects’ consciousness of the old and fill it with the new. The new person was one who only lived in such pasts as the Bolsheviks had specially conceived for him. He forgot. For this purpose churches and mosques were to be closed, old holidays replaced with new, revolutionary ones, books banned and clerics and members of the local elites arrested and deported. Only when the communists’ interpretations had become the interpretations of all and no longer faced any challengers could the revolution prevail.²³

But in the Soviet East the new person was a woman. For the Bolsheviks, women’s lives reflected the lack of liberty and backwardness from which Islamic societies were unable to free themselves. Women bore a heavy burden imposed on them by Islamic society because men kept them in a state of ignorance and excluded them from the public realm of politics. But women too were representatives of the order which the Bolsheviks considered barbaric. For as mothers and educators, women passed on to their offspring the traditions which apparently enslaved them. They alone bore the key which would enable the Bolsheviks to obtain access to the societies at the Islamic periphery. Women were the proletariat of the East, they liberated themselves vicariously for humanity as a whole and in this they became natural allies for the Bolsheviks.²⁴ Yet on this issue the view of the traditional elites, clan and tribal leaders and Islamic clerics hardly differed from that of the communist leaders, albeit with the difference that they too believed women to be on their side. For they saw women as custodians and preservers of tradition: those who assaulted them also called into question the social order which they represented. For this reason the Cultural Revolution faced bitter resistance in the Soviet East. When the conflict ultimately escalated, the Bolsheviks lost control of events and took refuge in terror. In the early 1920s the regime had still trusted in the effect of laws and ordinances. It reformed family law, forbade the marrying-off of underage girls and prohibited polygamy.

22 Desiatyi s’ezd RKP (B). Mart 1921 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet, [The Tenth Party Congress of the RCP. March 1921. Stenographic Report] Moscow 1963, p. 198f. Cf. the arguments of G. I. Broido, “Nasha natsional’naia politika i ocherednye zadachi Narkomnatsa” [Our Nationalities Policy and the Next Tasks for the Commissariat of Nationalities], in: Zhizn’ Natsional’nostei (1923) no. 1, p. 5 f., and Sergei Dimanshtein, Pis’mo tov. Stalina i bor’ba s Liuksemburgianstvom v nats. voprose [The Letter of Comrade Stalin and the Struggle against Luxemburgism in the Nationalities Question], in: RiN (1932) no. 1, pp. 1–16, esp. p. 7.

23 David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity 1917–1941*, Ithaca 2003, pp. 15–56; Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror. Die Geschichte des Stalinismus*, Munich 2004, pp. 94–108; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford 1999, pp. 67–88.

24 Gregory Massel, *The Surrogate Proletariat. Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929*, Princeton 1974; Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), pp. 33–68; Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 442–478.

With the introduction of state civil marriage the Bolsheviks attempted to curtail the mullahs' influence over the Muslims' lifeworld. But the government lacked the means by which to enforce its goals. The women's departments of the central committee – which opened branch offices in all the party organisations in the provinces in the early 1920s – served this purpose. In the larger cities of the Caucasus and central Asia women's clubs arose which generally had to be maintained by the local soviets. Their task was to free women from domestic seclusion, to instruct them in reading and writing and to familiarize them with the modern, socialist world of work. Some clubs offered women vocational training while others confined themselves to disseminating the regime's antireligious propaganda. The women's departments and women's clubs were places where the revolution's female representatives exemplified the new way of life in the hope that its superiority would be immediately apparent to all those capable of paying close attention.²⁵

The experiment already failed in its first phase, however. In the larger cities of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan the women's clubs were normally led by the wives of the communist leaders and by Christian immigrants, and where no women were present the party committees nominated men to chair the women's departments. But nowhere did the activists succeed in gaining a place in the women's lifeworld, and where they showed themselves to be subversives they met with rejection from the village inhabitants. When members of the Baku women's department visited the region of Nakhichevan on the Persian-Azerbaijani border in the autumn of 1922 to see how women's emancipation was progressing there, they met with disappointment. Whatever they attempted to explain to the women it was always the same: they understood "but a little" and feared the mullahs who threatened them with punishments of hell. "They particularly feared people forcing them to remove the chador, enrolling them as party members and turning them into Russians."²⁶

It was not least the male communists who conspired against their own party leadership on this question. A man who had presented his wife in public as the member of a club would have lost his standing in his village. This was especially true of the communist office-bearers. When the head of the Azerbaijani party, Ali Heidar Karaev visited the border region of Nakhichevan in July 1925, he asked the local functionaries their attitude towards women's emancipation. He learned that the communists prohibited their women from attending political assemblies. They had refused to open a women's club in Nakhichevan. "The members of the regional committee only call to mind the 'work among women' when one of them thinks of marrying, when the women's department serves as a venue for him to choose his fiancée," he later complained on reporting his

25 RGASPI, Fond 17, opis' 10, delo 346, p. 4; RGASPI, Fond 64, opis' 1, delo 217, p. 128; Aina Sultanova, *Shchastlivye zhenshchiny sovet'skogo Azerbaidzhana*, [The Happy Women of Azerbaijan], Baku 1964; Fannina W. Halle, *Frauen des Ostens. Vom Matriarchat bis zu den Fliegerinnen von Baku* [Women of the East: From Matriarchy to the Female Pilots of Baku], Zürich 1938.

26 RGASPI, Fond 64, opis' 1, delo 222, p. 10.

experience to the central committee in Baku. He had gained the impression that it was “as if Sovietisation only concerns men and has passed women by.”²⁷

Nor did the family laws of the Soviet state have any effect in such environments. In the spring of 1927, even in the district of Lenkoran in the immediate vicinity of Baku activists of the women’s department found nothing which was consistent with the new way of life. “Most of the population, particularly the women” followed the religious commandments and consummated marriage in the traditional way. The ban on polygamy was ignored. No one was interested in the Soviet holidays or the laws enacted by the government.²⁸ The village inhabitants – men and women – did not desire changes which called their lives into question, they instead sought answers which gave meaning to the existing ways of life. But the communists were unable to provide them with such answers. This was why the “authority of the clergy” was “extremely strong in women’s eyes”, as the women’s department of the Azerbaijani communist party put it in 1927.

They consider it their duty to consult the mullah on all matters concerning their lives and, even though the mullah’s answer is frequently unsatisfactory, they all believe him and are open in relation to him alone. That is to say, for them the mullah is a judge, doctor and much more besides.²⁹

Where the Bolsheviks saw religious communities such as the Bahais in Azerbaijan, the Sunni reformist movements in Tatarstan or the Mennonites and Baptists in Siberia as sources of competition or as an alternative no one was spared violence, whether rich or poor. In Kazan’ and in Ufa Islamic clerics had taken over from the Bolsheviks the project of women’s emancipation. The Tatar mullahs and their congregations had turned to “face the woman” (*litsom k zhenshchine*), as a report of the GPU from 1925 stated. The Bolsheviks could bear this marginalisation no longer. Where failures had occurred persons whom the Bolsheviks deemed enemies were at work: nationalists, tribal leaders and mullahs who deadened their subjects’ consciousness and obstructed the Bolsheviks’ access to Muslims. In the quarrel over the “correct” way of life, the sole winner would be the one who silenced competing interpretations. At the peak of the Cultural Revolution, in the years 1927 and 1928, the regime had clan leaders removed from their homelands and deported; former members of national parties and Islamic clerics were arrested and Sufi preachers were expelled from the Soviet Union.³⁰

27 RGASPI, Fond 17, opis’ 16, delo 255, p. 95 f.

28 Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki [State Archive for the Modern History of the Republic of Azerbaijan, subsequently referred to as: GANI], Fond 379, opis’ 6, delo 51, p. 1; RGASPI, Fond 17, opis’ 17, delo 24, pp. 260–263.

29 GANI, Fond 379, opis’ 6, delo 51, p. 4 f.

30 RGASPI, Fond 17, opis’ 85, delo 214, p. 17. Cf. A. B. Junusova, *Islam v Bashkirii 1917–1994* [Islam in Bashkiria 1917–1994], Ufa, 1995, pp. 41–47; Andrej S. Savin, “Obraz vraga. Protestantskie tserkvi v sibirskoi presse, 1928–1930” [The Enemy’s Picture. The Protestant Church in the Siberian Press 1928–1930], in: Sergei A. Papkov (ed.), *Ural i Sibir’ v Stalinskoi politike* [The Urals and Siberia in Stalinist Politics], Novosibirsk: Sibirskii Khronograf, 2002, pp. 57–80; Irina Korovushkina Paert, *Popular Religion and Local Identity During the Stalin Revolution: Old Believers in the Urals, 1928–1941*, in: Donald J. Raleigh (ed.), *Provincial Landscapes. Local Dimensions of Soviet Power 1917–1953*, Pittsburgh 2001, pp. 171–193; Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 561–586.

This act of violence also made use of a simulation of the popular will. In the villages, the Bolsheviks staged artificial conflicts between the peasants during the soviet elections. Under the supervision of urban communists not only were deputies to be elected to the village soviet, in each village the assembly of peasants was to nominate enemies who were then excluded from the elections and entered in “blacklists”. But how was a class enemy recognizable? For the Bolsheviks the class enemy was chiefly a cultural category. The class enemy was a man who had conspired against the new way of life and prevented others from becoming what they might have been. The Bolsheviks opposed him through the woman who rose up against him during the soviet elections and revealed him as an oppressor. In December 1927, before the committee of the Nationalities Soviet in Moscow the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan, Samed Aga Agamaly Ogly, explained the feminisation of the class struggle in stating that the woman behaved “more honourably in relation to the cause than the man” and for this reason enjoyed “respect” among the population at large.³¹

In symbolic terms, the simulated class struggle was aroused by the clothing worn by Muslim women. It was the veil which offended the Bolsheviks because it symbolized for them the despotism and backwardness of the social order in which Muslim women lived. Women who wore the chador or parandzha not only resisted the gaze of unfamiliar men, they also failed to join the staged public which the Bolsheviks required in order to mobilize their subjects for their cause. It was not even possible to speak to them. Women’s shawls, headscarves and facial veils prevented them from performing physical work and sport and concealed ungroomed bodies. The chador also symbolized the dirt which the cultural revolutionaries associated with the Islamic ways of life.³² Accordingly, only a veilless woman could be a modern person. In this the Bolsheviks felt themselves to be in agreement with the national communists and the Islamic Enlightenment movement. For the nation would only take shape where the realms of men and women were no longer distinct from one other. In central Asia the local Islamic reformers pointed to the Muslim Tatar women who no longer wore the veil and also went bareheaded on the streets of Bukhara and Tashkent. As early as April 1917 the Azerbaijani nationalist leader Rasulgade had publicly declared that women were no longer to be excluded from political life since a nation of men could not exist.³³ But the practice of veiling visualized this separation, for the Bolsheviks as for the national communists. This was why the chador and communism were “as irreconcilable as dark night with the day’s bright sunshine,” as

31 Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation, subsequently referred to as: GARF], Fond 3316, opis’ 20, delo 201, p. 323. On the marginalisation of the *lishentsy* cf. Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts. Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936*, Ithaca, N.Y. 2003, pp. 45–75.

32 Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 62 f.

33 Kaspîi (April 23, 1917). Cf. Adeeb Khalid, *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia*, Berkeley 1998, pp. 222–228; Edward J. Lazzerini, *Beyond Renewal: The Jadid Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern World*, in: Jo-Ann Gross (ed.), *Muslims in Central Asia. Expressions of Identity and Change*, Durham 1992, pp. 151–166.

an Uzbek communist put it. In this sense, the removing of women's veils was a "victory of culture and light" over the gloomy past.³⁴

But the veil was also a representation of power. The removal of women's veils also meant destroying the symbols of the traditional order. "We are depriving the mullahs of yet another emblem" was how Agamaly Ogly explained the purpose of the veil-removing campaign in June 1928.³⁵ An unveiled woman had fallen out of the existing order and could no longer return to the bosom of the community. She was at the mercy of the Bolsheviks come what may, since she had to reinvent herself in her own environment as an alien person, and the cultural revolutionaries thus demonstrated their power over the local society.

The unveiling campaign which began in the spring of 1927 and continued up to the end of 1928 was a fiasco, in Uzbekistan just as much as in Azerbaijan. While thousands of women publicly cast off their veils, trampled them into the dirt or threw them onto fires, the campaign collapsed once the urban communists who were supposed to instigate the unveiling had left the villages. But it nonetheless left a deep trace on the local societies at the empire's Islamic periphery.

If I have the feeling that my language is held in contempt, my religion mocked, my culture disparaged, then I will react by making a demonstrative display of the attributes of my difference.

This was the Arab essayist Amin Maalouf's recent verdict on the modern striving for cultural homogeneity. "If one feels at every turn that one is betraying one's people and denying one's own self, this reduces one's readiness to reach out to the other person."³⁶ This is exactly how it was in this case. The cultural revolutionaries met with rejection not only from the mullahs, tribal leaders and village elders, but also from the women affected who had no perspective of a life outside their families and villages. There were not even any dresses and coats which might have replaced the chador or the Uzbek *parandzha*.³⁷ What sort of life might an unveiled woman have lived in the village? She would have become a laughing stock for the village's inhabitants and undermined her family's reputation. This was also the reason why even the village communists ultimately upheld the practice of veiling. If they had agreed to the removal of the veil they would have lost their authority in the village, which resided not least in the fact that they protected their wives and daughters from the importunate advances of other men. An unveiled woman dishonoured her husband and family because in the eyes of the local society she was transformed into a prostitute on whom anyone might inflict violence.³⁸

Women who had cast off the veil forever, who left their husbands or refused to marry men whom their parents had selected for them incurred the wrath of the local society.

34 Quoted in: Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 64.

35 RGASPI, Fond 17, opis' 17, delo 20, p. 248.

36 Maalouf, *Mörderische Identitäten* (footnote 7), p. 42 f.

37 GANI, Fond 379, opis' 6, delo 94, p. 23; GARF, Fond 3316, opis' 20, delo 995, p. 39.

38 Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 650-652, with references to sources.

Any slight deviation in one's way of life now came under suspicion of being the work of the godless Bolsheviks. Wherever the unveiling campaign left its mark, women who had "dishonoured" their families suffered violent attacks. In the spring of 1929 armed Kom-somol members patrolled the streets of Baku to protect unveiled women from attacks by angry men. In 1928 and 1929 alone, 368 women were murdered in Uzbekistan.³⁹

In this violent confrontation, Muslims and Bolsheviks became others and changed themselves and their worldview. The veil, polygamy and the separation of the sexes – all this now became a national symbol of dissociation. Following the unveiling campaign, men and women no longer found themselves in the realm of what could be taken for granted. What others declared to be barbaric and backward now had to be defended as a tradition and preserved. In Bukhara, Tashkent and even Baku the number of veiled women actually increased. The communists' wives in particular set a positive example and made a demonstrative and public show of their veiledness. Following the unveiling campaign more than ninety percent of women in Azerbaijan had newly donned their chadors, as the prominent Soviet women's activist, Antonina Nukhrat, indignantly noted during a speech in Moscow in October 1929. In some districts the Muslim party secretaries even forced Russian women to cover their hair.⁴⁰ "Eternal" traditions now existed. While the facial veil had not been introduced in Uzbekistan until the nineteenth century, following the Russian conquest of central Asia, in the late 1920s the natives considered it an "old" and Islamic tradition.⁴¹

For the Bolsheviks this was nothing other than a confrontation between oppressed women and malevolent kulaks. Men who killed or abused women were kulaks irrespective of their social class. At the All-Union Congress of the "League of the Militant Godless" in June 1929 the murdered women were celebrated as martyrs. In Tashkent the party organized exhibitions where photographs of killed women were presented to visitors. These martyrs had not been murdered, they had "fallen in the struggle".⁴² Even during the unveiling campaign the regime already staged show trials against men who had killed women or forced them to wear the veil in public. In 1928 in Uzbekistan alone the Supreme Court passed death sentences on 73 perpetrators, while over a hundred were sent to a work camp for a period of ten years. In February 1930, at the peak of collectivisation when more women were killed in a single month than in the whole of 1929, the central government in Moscow enacted a law classifying the murder and abuse of emancipated

39 GARF, Fond 3316, opis' 21, delo 680, pp. 93-96; S. Akopov, *Bor'ba s bytovymi prestupleniiami* [The Struggle Against Crimes Against Customs and Traditions], in: *Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti* (1930) no. 4/5, pp. 58-69, esp. p. 66; A. Polianskaia, *Rabota po uluchsheniiu truda i byta zhenshchin* [Work on Improving Women's Labour and Way of Life], in: *Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti* (1930) no. 3, pp. 91-96, esp. p. 93; Marianne Ruth Kamp, *Unveiling Uzbek Women: Liberation, Representation and Discourse 1906–1929*, University of Chicago, Ph.D. diss., 1998, pp. 297-313.

40 GARF, Fond 6983, delo 5, p. 125; RGASPI, Fond 613, opis' 3, delo 41, p. 7; Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 179.

41 Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 43 f.

42 *Pravda* (June 12, 1929); Halle, *Frauen* (footnote 25), p. 174.

women as a counterrevolutionary act.⁴³ This also applied to the men who had murdered their sister-in-law in 1925 in a Kyrgyz *aul* for her refusal to submit to their will. The GPU saw in this the work of class enemies and spoke of a counterrevolutionary act, while in maintaining silence over the murder the *aul's* inhabitants insisted on their difference. The Cultural Revolution's campaigns continued at intervals into the late 1930s, but the Bolsheviks were unable to culturally subjugate the Soviet Union's Islamic periphery. All attempts at violent encroachment on the Muslims' lifeworlds – including once again in the years of the Great Terror – were frustrated through the defiance of the local elites which had come to power under the Bolshevik policy of indigenisation. And as the national communist leaders in the republics were unable to do anything to counter this defiance and allied themselves with the local communists in opposition to the centre, they came under suspicion of disloyalty. With each failed Cultural Revolution campaign, doubts over the national communists' reliability in the Islamic republics grew until Stalin came to see in them nothing but foreign spies and enemies of the people and they perished in the maelstrom of terror. Except for the Azerbaijani party leader Mir Dzhafar Bagirov not a single Muslim national communist survived the year 1939.⁴⁴ The idea of the new person thus died in bloody terror.

How can what has been described be linked with the aim of tracing representations of changing social orders? If representations were nothing more than a reflection of the orders in which people live, the history related here would be of no account. It would point to an order existing beyond representations, in which people might act only as prescribed for them by the orders which they reproduce. Bolsheviks and Muslims would be representatives of orders and no historian would be able to overcome the abyss separating consciousness and reality.

But actuality only offers the norms which we ourselves establish.⁴⁵ We must abandon the notion of representations as media bridging consciousness and actuality and interposing themselves between ourselves and reality, as Ernst Cassirer asserts. Philosophers have since abandoned the futile quest for congruence of reality and its reproduction in consciousness. They no longer consider representations as copies of reality or tools by which we access objective reality. Representations enable us to find our way in the world which we have created ourselves and to influence this world. Just as we invent ourselves in apprehending the world, we also invent the others with whom we exist in the world: we do so through the practices by which we give one another to understand who we are. At the same time, others are also involved in creating our world as they make their view of things known to us. Accordingly, the production of representations is not an ability, a

43 GARF, Fond 6983, opis' 1, delo 5, pp. 107–109; Sultanova, *Shchastlivye zhenshchiny* (footnote 25), p. 104.

44 Baberowski, *Der Feind* (footnote 3), pp. 777–830; Northrop, *Veiled Empire* (footnote 3), p. 240 f.

45 Richard Rorty, *Wahrheit und Fortschritt*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000 [English edition: *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Volume 3, Cambridge 1998], p. 198.

special capacity which man has at his disposal, it is rather a practice by which he continually re-invents his reality.⁴⁶

Therein lies the significance of representations for the work of the student of culture: they refer us not to a world beyond significance but instead to the various ways of inhabiting worlds which we ourselves create. Accordingly, the conflict of representations which unfolded in the 1920s and 1930s between communists and Muslims at the periphery of the Soviet Union is no mere triviality: in this conflict the protagonists invented a world which no longer had any space for others. Yet in the light of representations historians become aware of more than just the peculiarities of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. In turning to alien contexts in which alien people saw different truths, they themselves become others. This will unsettle them. But they will no longer maintain that it is they who live in the right world and others in the false one.

46 Johannes Fabian, *Präsenz und Repräsentation. Die Anderen und das anthropologische Schreiben*, in: Eberhard Berg/Martin Fuchs (eds), *Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation*, Frankfurt a. M. 1999, pp. 335-364, esp. pp. 335-339; Michel Foucault, *Die Anormalen*, Frankfurt a. M. 2003.