

Research Article

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Interdisciplinary Approach to Overcoming the Persistence of Patriarchal Islamic Interpretations: Gender Equality, the Development of Empathy and Children's Rights, and Insights from the Reformist Eurasian Scholars of Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract: Gender equality and women's rights are among the most discussed issues in the context of Islam. Any thorough analysis of the persistence of conservative patriarchal religious interpretations in Muslim communities should also consider social factors. The conservative appropriation of Islam is not only the result of theological factors but also a manifestation of a conservative and patriarchal habitus. This article draws attention to the vitality of empathy in establishing universal equal human dignity. It dwells on the idea of the universal innate nature of the child to offer some solutions to overcome the persistence of conservative religious interpretations and develop gender equality in the Muslim context. Also, the reformist views of the Jadids and Alash intellectuals, the Eurasian Muslim reformists of the early twentieth century, are analyzed as authentic historical and conceptual precedents to develop gender-egalitarian Islamic interpretations. Overall, this article establishes a connection between women's rights in Islam, the universal innate nature of the child (and the universality of children's right-friendly parenting and education that fosters empathy and critical thinking), and the intellectual legacy of the Jadids and Alash intellectuals, who wanted to transform the conservative and patriarchal habitus through educational reform, literary works, and a rationalistic, thematico-holistic approach to Islam.

Keywords: empathy, universality of human rights, gender egalitarian Islamic interpretations, Islamic rationalism, Eurasia, erosion of empathy, conservative and patriarchal habitus, the Jadids, Alash, children's rights

"The degree of development of society can be judged by the status a woman occupies" (Musa Bigiev – reformist Islamic scholar – Jadid)

"Society will reach happiness and the true level of humanity only when the stinking fog over woman's head clears" (Mukhtar Auezov – Alash intellectual)

1 Introduction

The universal equal dignity (or moral equality) of human beings is the axiological foundation of the universality of human rights, and gender equality is one of the fundamental principles and values of human rights.

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However, in our days, gender equality and women's human rights are some of the most discussed topics in the context of Islam. By and large, discussions on gender have become one of the polarizing factors that divide societies across multiple fault lines. Especially in Eurasian societies and the so-called Muslim world, challenging conventional gender norms is usually seen as a pernicious practice of the "corrupt West." On the other hand, progressive scholars and activists in the Western world are also experiencing a post-socialist backlash of conservative thought from Eastern European societies and also at home.¹

Although Islam gave women an unprecedentedly high status in its early stages and elevated women by granting them legal status and conferring basic rights (this status was very high for the time and subsequent periods, even almost into the early modern era), traditional Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence were constructed by the subsequent generations of early (male) Muslim jurists who acted in accordance with their historical context.² This particular historical and social context (or *habitus*) was deeply marked by patriarchal norms and culture. Gender equality is not accepted, in principle, by traditional conservative Islam, be it Sunni, Shia, or Salafi Islam, which is still relevant for many Muslims today. Moreover, progressive or revisionist Muslim scholars argue that Muslims have become more conservative in the last century.³ Therefore, particularly the Muslims, as Sachedina⁴ puts it, are confronted with the situation when women's rights are targeted by the "relativistic challenge" posed by the "conservative Muslim appropriation of Islam." On the other hand, gender inequality and the low level of democratization in Muslim countries are closely interrelated.⁵ Authoritarianism is thus inextricably linked to the internalization of patriarchal religious interpretations.

With the aim of exploring the problem of the lack of development of women's rights (foremost, gender equality) and offering some solutions, in this article, we (political scientist, theologian, and early childhood development practitioner) conduct an interdisciplinary research that includes Islamic theology, philosophy of human rights, relational sociology, feminist studies, children's rights, and early childhood development.

Since we consider religion as a social phenomenon and humans as social beings (basically, no one is born a conservative or progressive egalitarian), we argue that the internalization of patriarchal interpretations in Muslim societies should be analyzed in terms of social dynamics. To this end, in our theoretical-conceptual framework, we use Bourdieu's concepts, especially *habitus*, i.e., the socialized norms or tendencies that shape and guide our thoughts and actions. Overall, Bourdieu's relational sociology is important in understanding the social determination that leads to the acceptance and persistence of certain worldviews, ideologies, and religious interpretations.

Also, our arguments about empathy and its crucial role in personality and social development are based on the idea of the innate universal nature of the child as conceptualized by Maria Montessori, originator of a humanistic education system.⁶ We assume that care and empathy, as well critical thinking (in Montessorian conceptualization, "independent thinking," an indispensable characteristic of a child-centric humanistic education) are universal and do not depend on gender, but are shaped and influenced by the person's social context.

Progressive and reform-oriented Islamic intellectuals view religion and culture (and traditions) as dynamic, changeable, and hybrid phenomena that should serve human needs. Furthermore, they emphasize that "there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender justice... Gender justice is crucial, indispensable and essential."⁷

On the other hand, given the conservative patriarchal backlash in the Eurasian Muslim communities that were doubly colonized by the Russian Empire and then the Soviet system and that suffer from cultural, historical, and intellectual amnesia, it is important to unpack the legacy of the Jadids and Alash-Orda intellectuals. These progressive Eurasian Muslim intellectuals of the early twentieth century, based on Islamic

1 Sibgatullina and Kemper, "Contesting Boundries," 6.

2 An-Naim, "State Responsibility."

3 See, for example, Zaharin, "Reconsidering."

4 Sachedina, *Islam*, 117–8.

5 Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism."

6 Montessori, *The Absorbent*.

7 Safi, "Introduction," 10–1.

rationalism, wanted to change the habitus of Eurasian Muslim societies in which the status of women was a key indicator of oppression, underdevelopment, backwardness, and colonization. They considered gender equality and the transformation of the conservative and patriarchal habitus as essential components for developing cultural capital and the overall renewal and transformation of their societies. However, the Soviet regime ended such a process in the 1930s by eliminating almost all these progressive intellectuals, opinion leaders, and their followers as a distinct social and cultural force. On the basis of this destruction, we can argue that the Soviet system paved the way for the spread of conservative religious teachings (throughout the Eurasian region, where the native intelligentsia and the educated classes were purged and exterminated by the Soviet regime) after the collapse of the Soviet system.

Overall, this article highlights the importance of empathy, which is a crucial concept for legitimizing the universality of human rights and the development of gender-egalitarian Islamic interpretations. Furthermore, this article argues that it is important to see the connection between the cultivation of empathy and critical thinking and the development of children's rights (which is about child-centric humanistic parenting and education) on the one hand, and the acceptance and internalization of gender-egalitarian religious interpretations on the other hand. The transformation of the conservative and patriarchal habitus of Muslim communities (which normalizes and perpetuates authoritarianism and patriarchy) through a focus on child rearing and education that cultivates empathy and develops critical thinking is relatively unexplored in today's research on Islam. This may be a result of the lack of interdisciplinary research and the popularity of monodisciplinarity in contemporary academia, or it may be because children's rights are still one of the most misunderstood human rights categories.⁸

All in all, the aforementioned discussion can explain why, in this article, we have made the connection between women's rights in Islam, the universal, innate nature of the child (and, by extension, child right-friendly parenting and education that fosters empathy and critical thinking), and the intellectual legacy of the Eurasian Muslim reformist intellectuals of the early twentieth century.

This article consists of seven sections. In Section 2, we examine the conservative appropriation of Islam and its relativistic challenge to women's rights. To shed light on the reasons for the rise and persistence of conservatism in Muslim communities, in Section 3, we draw on the concept of habitus developed by Bourdieu and try to conceptualize the phenomenon we refer to as the social determination of conservatism and patriarchy. Then, in Section 4, we discuss the importance of empathy in establishing universal, equal human dignity and introduce the idea of the universal innate nature of the child to provide the basis for solutions to overcome the persistence of conservative and patriarchal religious interpretations and develop gender equality in the Muslim context. Furthermore, Section 5, by engaging with patriarchal culture, sheds light on why the deficiency of empathy may be socially constructed. Section 6 analyzes the reformist views and gender-egalitarian positions of the Jadids and Alash intellectuals as authentic historical and conceptual precedents. Finally, in Section 7, we theorize how the conservative and patriarchal habitus can be changed. In doing so, we present our arguments about the synergy between children's and women's rights and the contribution of empathetic, child-centric parenting in developing gender equality.

2 Conservative Appropriation of Islam and Its Relativistic Challenge to Women's Rights

Nowadays, the conservative appropriation of Islam is used to disseminate the claims for a relativistic approach to the human rights of women. Overall, the particularity of a specific conservative Islamic language, culture, and moral discourse connected with women's position in Muslim societies⁹ pose a relativistic challenge to

⁸ Alderson, "Common Criticism," 307.

⁹ Sachedina, *Islam*, 117.

women's rights. In general, the claims about cultural authenticity in the Muslim context gave a result of a denial of recognition of the full spectrum of women's rights because of conservative Islamic teachings.¹⁰

On the other hand, the rise and popularity of patriarchal conservatism is linked to the rise of post-colonial Islamist and especially post-colonial puritanical groups, who employ literalistic (in place of contextual) and male-centric approach to produce Islamic interpretations.¹¹ However, many anticolonial movements of the twentieth century promoted gender equality. Gender equality and development of women's rights were important for anticolonial movements since they also fought against cultural, social, economic, and technological backwardness where entrenched feudal-patriarchal norms played a significant role.¹² Although anticolonial groups offered women an emancipatory place in the liberation process (women's rights were seen important for anticolonial liberation and political development), the majority of male anticolonial leaders in the twentieth-century Muslim societies did not develop a comprehensive agenda for gender equality. The spread and internalization of patriarchal culture and norms among Muslims are explained as the long-term negative effects of colonization. Overall, the colonial legacy and post-colonial syndromes allowed Muslim authorities to preserve patriarchy and androcentric hetero-systems.¹³

Post-colonial trauma, together with the radicalization of Islam, which promotes scriptural literalism and rigid imitation ("taqleed"), has prevented many present-day social questions (including gender equality) from being addressed. For example, Ghoshal¹⁴ observes concerning Islam in Asia that fundamentalists have tried to homogenise Islam over the past three decades. The slow but steady process of transforming Islam in Asia from a syncretic and inclusive Islam to a puritanical and exclusivist is the most serious factor that has fuelled conflicts and divided Muslims and others in otherwise tolerant and harmonious plural societies of Asia.¹⁵ Overall, the rise of post-colonial Islamist groups (Islamism or Political Islam among Muslims gained impetus since the late 1970s as a response to the secular and socialist experiments in the Muslim societies in the post-colonial period) and puritanical groups contributed to the spread and reproduction of Muslim conservatism worldwide. In essence, the Islamist movements are characterized by the doctrinal influence on sexual moralities and morphologies through asserting control, for example, on the female body and female sexuality.¹⁶

Duderija¹⁷ emphasizes that gender equality affirmative interpretations of Islam in the pre-modern period were largely, if not completely, nonexistent, as they were premised on the privileging of patriarchal hermeneutics. The exploitation, marginalization, and objectification of women in patriarchal Muslim tradition ensue from the patriarchal formulation of the concept of honor.¹⁸ Fatima Mernissi,¹⁹ a pioneer of Islamic feminism, points out that the sacred text can be either a threshold to liberation or an insurmountable obstacle, depending on the method of interpretation. On the other hand, the production of knowledge about Muslim women, like all knowledge production, is embedded in power structures and institutional histories, making this knowledge inherently and uniquely political. In general, Islamic theology "has been limited to commentaries on existing texts rather than a comprehensive reinterpretation of revealed sources to make them useful for the particular concerns of a changed context."²⁰

Overall, conservative and patriarchal Islamic scholarship tends to confine the role of reason within strict limits and mainly concerning the secondary issues of jurisprudence. For example, Asharite theology, which became the mainstream Sunnism by overshadowing all other more rationalistic schools of Sunni Islam,

¹⁰ Kandiyoti, "Reflections on."

¹¹ Zaharin, "Reconsidering."

¹² Sunseri, "Moving Beyond."

¹³ Zaharin, "Reconsidering."

¹⁴ Ghoshal, "Arabization."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Zaharin, "Reconsidering."

¹⁷ Duderija, "Contemporary Muslim," 163.

¹⁸ Duderija, "Using Progressive," 97.

¹⁹ Mernissi, *The Veil*, 62.

²⁰ Hermansen, "Series Editor's," 12.

appears to espouse a theological position, which is critical, even detrimental to rationalism.²¹ This theological and historical phenomenon led to the fortification of antirational scripturalism and the emergence of the large of “unthinkable” in Islamic thought. All these seriously impede the fostering of critical thinking in Muslim communities and Muslim-majority countries and produces the vicious cycle of the epistemological crisis in conservative Islamic scholarship, manifested in intellectual minimalism and broad scopes of “unthinkable.” The rise of conservative scholarship in the last century and the literalistic approach stunt the intellectual diversity of Islam’s rational and spiritual legacies.²²

To understand the reasons for the rise and persistence of conservatism in Muslim communities, it is necessary to look at the social dynamics and not just the theological ones. Therefore, in the next part, we revert to the concept of habitus and try to conceptualize the phenomenon that we call the social determination of conservatism and patriarchy.

3 Habitus and Social Determination of Authoritarianism and Patriarchy

This article argues that a thorough analysis of the persistence of conservatism in Muslim communities should also consider social factors. After all, religion is a social phenomenon; religious interpretations and beliefs are socially constructed. Therefore, examining the social dynamics that lead to the popularity and internalization of conservative, patriarchal interpretations is essential. The concept of habitus, as conceptualized by Bourdieu, can provide important insights.

According to Bourdieu’s conceptualization, habitus can be understood as socialized subjectivity; it is also about the so-called socially bounded or socially structured and bounded human rationality.²³ Therefore, the habitus can be depicted as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.”²⁴ The habitus implies that the individual and even the personal, the subjective, tends to become social and collective. The habitus is, therefore, important for understanding how the correspondence between social structures and mental and unconscious structures comes about.

Overall, the conservative appropriation of Islam is not only the result of theological factors but also an expression of a conservative and patriarchal habitus in Muslim communities and Muslim-majority countries. It is in this habitus that the social determination of conservative religion and patriarchy takes place. Gender-inclusive interpretations have already been produced by rationalistic Islamic schools but are still marginal in many Muslim societies, e.g. Eurasian ones (not only the reformist scholars of the past century, such as Musa Bigiev, were depicted as “preceding their time and speaking for future generations,”²⁵ but even today’s progressive scholars may have relatively marginal positions in Muslim communities).

As Wacquant explains Bourdieu’s conceptualization, “habitus is a mediating notion that helps us revoke the commonsense duality between the individual and the social” since this concept captures “the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality, that is, the way society becomes deposited in people in the form of lasting dispositions or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways, which then guide them.”²⁶

The so-called primary habitus, which is acquired in the early phase of socialization, plays a fundamental role in the development of the human personality. Bourdieu considers the family to be the privileged site for the most profound imprinting of the habitus, as it provides the child with the first definitive framework for the

²¹ Hunter, “Introduction;” Bacik, *Contemporary*; Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, “Epistemological Reform.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 126.

²⁴ Bourdieu, *The Logic*, 53.

²⁵ “Professor Taufik.”

²⁶ Wacquant, “Habitus,” 318.

systematic development of the group's values and ideologies.²⁷ Children learn empathy, solidarity, and equity in their families; similarly, authoritarianism and patriarchal culture are socially learned in the conservative and patriarchal habitus. Overall, parenting styles, which constitute the primary habitus and create a type of world around a child, have a crucial impact on the development of the skill of empathy and fostering critical thinking. On the other hand, in later stages, the educational system takes the place of the family in refining and solidifying the habitus.²⁸

In a broader picture, the transmission of values and judgments, everyday classifications, the unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, parenting, and education styles and practices can be counted in the context of habitus. To consider the habitus means to consider the social conditions that create the mental conditions, as well as the unconscious patterns that promote the acceptance and internalization of authoritarian, conservative religious interpretations, which are about the social determination of authoritarianism and patriarchy. The concept of social determination is necessary to recognize the connection between our mental (as well, unconscious) structures and the habitus – the social structure (or order) into which we are born and in which we develop our personality. In other words, this concept is important to illustrate how the social space or habitus is “patterned” in our personality.

To summarize, we argue that the conservative and patriarchal habitus creates the social, political, cultural, historical, and economic contexts in which people live and which determine their theologically conservative, patriarchal inclinations. This habitus is a major factor in the emergence of the relativistic challenge of conservative religious interpretations to women's rights. Nevertheless, every habitus is inherently dynamic and transformative by its nature. Therefore, to lay the grounds for the offering solutions to transform habitus, overcome the persistence of patriarchal interpretations, and develop gender equality in the Muslim context, in the next section, we discuss the importance of empathy in substantiation of the universal equal human dignity and introduce the idea of the universal innate nature of a child.

4 The Universality of Human Dignity, the Universal Innate Nature of the Child, and Development of Empathy

4.1 The Role of Empathy in Understanding the Universal Equal Human Dignity

Not only reason but also emotions should play an important role in the theory and defense of human rights.²⁹ Human beings intuitively “catch” and “match” other's emotions and actions by mere observation, and they are wired to connect with others and share their feelings.³⁰ Empathy can be defined “as an ideal candidate mechanism to underlie caring behaviors in response to another's pain, need, or distress.”³¹ It is a key social skill that enables us to resonate with the pain, distress, affect, and state of mind of others.³²

Empathy allows us to know that all people are equal in the sense that everyone is a sentient being – susceptible to emotional and physical pain.³³ Therefore, being based on the recognition that others feel and think as we do and that our inner feelings are similar, empathy is fundamental in understanding the universal equal dignity of human beings.³⁴ In other words, the universality of human rights can be known through

²⁷ Shirley, “A Critical Review,” 98.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Barreto, “Ethics of Emotions,” 75.

³⁰ Gutsell and Inzlicht, “Intergroup Differences,” 596.

³¹ Knafo et al., “The Developmental.”

³² Levy et al., “The Neural Development.”

³³ Schultz, “Empathy as the Key,” 62.

³⁴ Hunt, *Inventing Human*, 29.

empathy, which connects us to other people and leads us to acknowledgment and respecting the equal agency of others.

Like any other category of human rights, women's rights are based on respect for the dignity and integrity of women and, above all, on the idea of the universal equal dignity of human beings. Equality is not just an abstract concept or a political slogan. Rather, it must be internalized in some way through empathy.³⁵ Empathy is necessary to accept gender equality as part of the universalist feature of human rights, whose defining characteristic is to belong to all, but not to be a privilege or the "rights" of a particular chosen groups.³⁶ Therefore, not only can gender equality be substantiated by empathy but also empathy leads us to see injustice in gender relations as something that cannot be tolerated.

Overall, empathy is not only a faculty of healthy persons but also a foundation of healthy social relations and a key to understanding the universality of human rights.³⁷ Furthermore, empathy is a key to understanding gender equality and gender diversity because it opens the way to appreciate the worth of people of other genders. Adding empathy brings emotional and sentimental aspects to the perception of universal equal dignity of human beings, which is crucial to the rationale of gender equality.

4.2 Fostering Empathy and Critical Thinking by Being Premised on the Universal Innate Nature of the Child and the Universality of Children's Rights

It is a particular habitus or social context that normalizes and perpetuates either authoritarianism or patriarchy in a given society. To study the habitus is to understand processes of personality formation from birth.

Overall, it is crucial to study children's rights to understand the political and social processes.³⁸ A better understanding of the influence of parenting styles and education models on the individual and social life helps explain the ongoing religious, social, and political processes in the Muslim societies. Also, the epistemological crisis, manifested in intellectual minimalism and mental barriers of the "unthinkable" (touched earlier), is a result of child-rearing and education inculcating blind subordination to authority, invalidating empathy, and normalizing the acceptance of hierarchy.

The universality of children's rights is based on the idea of the universality of the innate nature of the child. The universality of the innate nature of the child suggests that the needs of children and the laws of child development are universal. In line with the acceptance of an innate child's nature, as with the physical embryo, where the fertilized egg passes through a formative period guided by hormonal and chemical activity, so too the "spiritual embryo" (the concept developed by Montessori) passes through various stages in its formative development guided by "inner sensitivities" and assisted by a very special type of mind called "the absorbent mind."³⁹ This mind soaks and absorbs unconsciously and at unlimited speed all emotional impressions from the environment so that these impressions form the child's lifelong psyche and personality.⁴⁰

Like the physical embryo, the "spiritual embryo," which refers to the universal emotional and psychological developmental stages of children in the formative years (from birth to age three of a child),⁴¹ is an indication that it is not appropriate to argue about the different natures of being a child by claiming that children in different religious and cultural communities (and different genders) supposedly have "different" psychologies, resistances, and tolerances depending on their environment. Respect for the best interests of the child, consideration of the child's evolving capacities and care are among the most important concepts that

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Frick, *Human Rights*.

³⁷ Hunt, *Inventing Human*.

³⁸ Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, "Strictness as."

³⁹ Hilson, "Montessori's."

⁴⁰ Montessori, *The Absorbent*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

define the model of parenting according to the contemporary notion of the children's rights (specifically, as it is conceptualized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the comments of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child). Overall, the universality of the innate nature of the child suggests that the needs of the child and the laws of child development are beyond cultural or religious contexts, and they are functional and "a-cultural."⁴²

Research suggests that empathy is not unconditionally found the human capacity, but it is more a skill that is learned,⁴³ although people with a healthy personality have at least the basics of empathy. Specifically, studies on psychology show that while there is evidence of genetic influences on the development of empathy, environmental factors are primarily responsible,⁴⁴ particularly the patterns of primary caregivers in the early developmental period shape the human empathic brain.⁴⁵ The positive emotional development of children of all genders is directly related to the empathy of parents or other primary caregivers to a child.⁴⁶ The neural basis of empathy is longitudinally shaped by parent–child synchrony across the first decade, specifically the experience of interpersonal resonance within the mother–child attachment.⁴⁷ Importantly, a recent meta-analysis of infants' response to maternal still face found no main effects of gender differences in emotional development.⁴⁸

Studies in early child development and psychology emphasize that positive emotional development in early childhood is critically important for future healthy emotional, psychological, and physical development.⁴⁹ The neural development of empathy is highly sensitive to caregiving and early trauma.⁵⁰ Overall, building empathy is an ongoing, lifelong process, and it begins with how the parents cultivate it since the early age.⁵¹

On the whole, the attachment types, the emotional bonds between a child and a primary caregiver, directly shape personality development, including empathy. Namely, secure attachment creates sound empathy, whereas insecure attachment hinders the development of empathy. Empathy is positively correlated with secure attachment to primary caregivers but negatively correlated with insecure attachment.⁵² It is the primary task of primary caregivers to be equipped with the skills that help instill empathy in children. Unless there is an underlying neurological disorder, the adults can go a long way to making sure to raise empathetic children. A world with empathy is a world where people understand and care.⁵³ Hence, the early age development stage or primary habitus created by the family environment plays a very important role in personality development.

Human beings are often limited in using their intellect by the boundaries of the system of categories they owe to their upbringings and education.⁵⁴ Therefore, humanistic or children's right-friendly parenting must include not only empathy but also critical thinking (according to Montessori, it is independent thinking). Critical (independent) thinking is indispensable in humanistic education because it prepares a child to be an independent personality, and it views a child as an autonomous being. Also, critical thinking implies fulfilling the basic principles of children's rights, such as the right to be heard and to participate. As such, critical thinking is indispensable in raising happy and mature children. To conclude, in realizing the child's well-being, it is necessary to see that there is no contradiction or serious discrepancy between the findings of

⁴² Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, "The Need."

⁴³ Mirra, *Educating*; Trothen, "Engaging."

⁴⁴ Knafo et al., "The Developmental."

⁴⁵ Levy et al., "The Neural Development."

⁴⁶ Alhusen et al., "A Longitudinal Study;" Bowlby, "The Making."

⁴⁷ Levy et al., "The Neural Development."

⁴⁸ Alexander and Wilcox, "Sex Differences."

⁴⁹ Xu et al., "The Relationship."

⁵⁰ Levy et al., "The Neural Development."

⁵¹ Wegner, *Raising*.

⁵² Xu et al., "The Relationship."

⁵³ de Jonge and van Hanswijck, "I Feel How."

⁵⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 126.

child psychology on the fundamental role of positive emotional development and the concept of children's rights.⁵⁵

5 Erosion of Empathy and Patriarchal Culture

5.1 Socially Constructed Deficiency of Empathy

Although natural and universal, the human faculties to empathize and sympathize are in constant danger of being suppressed by different factors such as fear, hatred, cruelty, or ideology.⁵⁶ The brain effects related to less empathetic reactions are more a function of culture or social context than innate preferences.⁵⁷ Not only socially learned “cultural prejudices” but also socially learned authoritarianism and patriarchy impair, even invalidate empathy.

In essence, the connection is the normal condition of the human psyche.⁵⁸ Connection is about being concerned, and it is about empathy. However, disconnection or rupturing connection causes the deficiency or erosion of empathy. Research in early child development suggests that insecure and anxious attachment of a child to their mother and other caregivers can lead to empathy gap and other psychological problems. Specifically, children and adolescents with high secure attachment tend to show more empathy than those with low secure attachment.⁵⁹

As Wilmer⁶⁰ explains, rupture of connections (which is traumatic and affects both personal and social relationships) is necessary to produce patriarchal masculinity and feminine identity that normalizes and reinforces patriarchal masculinity. Contemporary Islamic reformist scholar Adis Duderija observes that with their focus on competition and domination, “patriarchal personality” traits lead to the erosion of empathy and breed arrogance, greed, disrespect for meaningful dialogue, and disregard for consideration of the legitimate needs and aspirations of others.⁶¹ Also, Carol Gilligan, whose works laid the grounds to develop the philosophical ethics known as the ethics of care, points out that “patriarchal culture” breaks and ruptures the human capacity for connections,⁶² which is about empathy.

The traditional patriarchal domination of gender and masculinity, authoritarian parenting and education, and indoctrination of authoritarian norms from an early age are important factors in eroding of empathy. In particular, authoritarian parenting styles and models of education not only create submissive individuals with deficient critical thinking (contributing significantly to the continuation of the epistemological crisis in conservative Islamic scholarship which exhibits a wide range of “unthinkable”) but also impair empathy and create an empathy gap. Authoritarian models of parenting and education are based on the fear of punishment. They create patterns of authority and subordination, which, following Gilligan's concept, can also be depicted as a “patriarchal culture” (see the aforementioned discussion). Ultimately, the vicious cycle of reproduction and perpetuation of authoritarianism and patriarchal culture rooted in child-rearing and education emerges.

We can gain some insights into the conservative patriarchal habitus in Muslim-majority countries by looking at the level of development of children's rights, the extent of abuse of children, and the nature of education models. Available research and data suggest that children in Muslim-majority countries (e.g., in the Middle East and North Africa) are frequently deprived of their basic rights. These countries generally have a

⁵⁵ Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, “The Need.”

⁵⁶ von Harbou, “A Remedy Called,” 150.

⁵⁷ Gutsell and Inzlicht, “Intergroup Differences,” 597.

⁵⁸ Gilligan and Richards, “The Deepening,” 4.

⁵⁹ Xu et al., “The Relationship.”

⁶⁰ Wilmer, “Empathy as Political,” 2862.

⁶¹ Duderija, “Using Progressive,” 99.

⁶² Gilligan and Richards, *The Deepening*.

poor record of upholding human rights for children and young people. Governments in some countries are simply unable or unwilling to adequately protect children.⁶³

On the other hand, traditional Islamic family law “is fundamentally premised on the notion of male guardianship over women” and consequently entails many features of inequality between men and women in relation to marriage, divorce, and similar matters. All these shape the socialization of women, who are conditioned from early childhood to submission, dependence, and learned helplessness.⁶⁴

The psychological basis of patriarchy not only requires a rupturing of the capacity for connectedness among male-identified citizens but also leads to the socialization of all identities to normalize that rupture by considering it an inherent and defining feature of both masculinity and the entire social world where male-is-norm.⁶⁵ Thus, the lack of empathy in some men (and internalized oppression in women) is a result of their negative social environment, particularly in early childhood. However, the universal, innate nature of a child means that these men could have developed a sound capacity for empathy with the help of empathic and caring parents or other primary caregivers.

To summarize, patriarchal culture, which is essentially the “culture of domination,” and the lack or erosion of empathy (which is rooted in authoritarian parenting and education, among other things) are closely linked.

5.2 Empathy Should Be Teachable for Religious People

It is important to note that while empathy is not clearly related to being religious, it is positively related to the way how religious contents are processed.⁶⁶ As such, empathy should be teachable for religious persons. While earlier research on empathy indicates that religiosity–empathy relation remained unclear,⁶⁷ more recent studies suggest that empathy, being a teachable skill, is expected to be taught and learned by religious practitioners.⁶⁸ We agree with the analysis of Duriez⁶⁹ that religiosity–empathy relation “should be understood in terms of how people process religious contents rather than in terms of whether and what people believe.”

The confinement of the role of reason within strict limits, which can be observed in the conservative religious scholarship (and a constituent element of conservative habitus like hierarchy), is an important reason for empathy erosion. Overall, the mental barriers of “unthinkable” and other cultural, psychological, and ideological reasons (which are the parts of conservative and patriarchal habitus) are the factors of empathy erosion in religious people.

The analysis of the social determination of authoritarian culture and patriarchal religious interpretations suggests that intellectuals with a more empathetic habitus sought to create inclusive and egalitarian Islamic interpretations (e.g., Musa Bigiev, a leading Jadid scholar who defended gender equality, had an intimate relationship with his mother (who was also his primary educator at home), his wife, and his children;⁷⁰ Abai, a leading Kazakh intellectual of the early Jadid generation, was brought up by empathetic grandmother and mother (who were his first poetry teachers)⁷¹, later Abai confronted his brutal and religiously conservative father, the leader of local community, who tried to enforce strict medieval religious rules.

⁶³ Chaney, “Comparative Analysis;” “Overview of Child’s Rights.”

⁶⁴ An-Naim, “State Responsibility.”

⁶⁵ Wilmer, “Empathy as Political,” 2862.

⁶⁶ Duriez, “Are Religious.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Trothen, “Engaging.”

⁶⁹ Duriez, “Are Religious.”

⁷⁰ Khayrutdinov, “Musa Bigiev.”

⁷¹ Yerdembekov, “Ulzhan Ana.”

6 Transformation of the Conservative and Patriarchal Habitus: Religious and Cultural Reforms

The habitus is not completely fixed and unchangeable. People are not destined to absolutely reproduce all the social structures into which they are born; there is the possibility of social change. The role of social determination in habitus should not be overestimated, and the dialectical antinomie between social determination and individual agency should not be constructed.⁷² On the other hand, human beings are not engrained in one habitus; as long as the social conditions of existence change, we have secondary or tertiary habitus.⁷³ The social space of the habitus, in which social determination operates, can be reshaped and changed through education and new models of parenting. Specifically, the social determination of some aspects of habitus can be changed by education nurturing empathy, mindfulness, and critical thinking.⁷⁴ By and large, the habitus should not be seen as the only agent of social action that is resistant to change.

6.1 Contingency of Patriarchal Religious Norms, Rationalistic Approach

The holistic approach to Islamic sources and history shows the contingency of patriarchal Islamic interpretations. As An-Naim notes, the founders of Sharia developed what they believed to be an appropriate legal and ethical system for their communities at a very local term. It is clear that they were not involved in the construction of unchangeable and “eternally valid” Sharia, as many Muslims claim today. Rather, the authoritative scholars expressed their views as individual theoretical derivations and cautioned against codifying or implementing them as the only valid version of Sharia.⁷⁵

A rationalist approach to the ethical–legal injunctions in the Qur’an and Sunnah, combined with thematic-holistic approach to the Islamic sources, as well as an acceptance of the inherent contextuality of Islam, make it possible to recognize that there is no inequality and hierarchy between genders.⁷⁶ The “Progressive Muslim Manhaj” or the methodology for producing ethically objectivist, nonpatriarchal Islamic interpretations, for example, is committed to the values and principles of human rights, such as gender equality. Therefore, this rationalistic methodology builds the conceptual compatibility between Islam and women’s human rights.⁷⁷ Moreover, we argue that progressive Islamic interpretations or methodology accepts and reaffirms what can be called “the naturalistic conception of human rights.”

It must be assumed that the universality of human rights among Muslims can be realized only if they accept it as consistent with their religious beliefs; therefore, the concept of human rights requires a religious, namely, Islamic, legitimation.⁷⁸ Although Islamic sources have the necessary resources for the conceptual search for the equal dignity of human beings and consequently gender equality,⁷⁹ it is crucial to change the patriarchal conservative habitus that normalizes and internalizes patriarchal religious interpretations. Since the education system takes the place of the family in refining and solidifying the habitus,⁸⁰ reformers should develop the cultural capital of their fellow human beings by engaging in education (e.g., by reforming the entire education system and making it children’s right friendly).

⁷² Shirley, “A Critical Review,” 98.

⁷³ Wacquant, “Habitus.”

⁷⁴ Wegner, *Raising*.

⁷⁵ An-Naim, “State Responsibility.”

⁷⁶ Duderija, “Contemporary Muslim.”

⁷⁷ Duderija, “The Imperatives,” 278–9.

⁷⁸ An-Naim, “State Responsibility,” 100.

⁷⁹ Duderija, *The Imperatives*.

⁸⁰ Shirley, “A Critical Review,” 98.

6.2 Rationalistic and Gender-Egalitarian Reformist Agenda of Ant-Colonial Jadids and Alash-Orda Intellectuals

The Eurasian Muslim societies, which used to be a constituent part of the former Soviet state, like many parts of the world, have been experiencing a resurgence of authoritarian–patriarchal Islamic religious interpretations. The collapse of the Soviet system signaled not only the end of Soviet ideology but also the embracement of hegemonic discourses on cultural authenticity and the mobilization of tradition as a tactic of governance,⁸¹ which empowers the social determination of conservative religion. However, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the generation of progressive Islamic scholars, writers, and political activists, who became known as the Jadids, robustly defended the affirmative action policies focused on liberation of colonized Muslim communities and emancipation of women, who were double-oppressed by external-colonial and internal-feudal, patriarchal systems.

Jadidism broadly can be conceptualized as pro-human rights (in today's conceptualization), education, social, and political movement of the Eurasian Muslims. Particularly, it was the movement for Islamic modernization, and its approach, in Islamic theological terms, was rationalistic. Anticolonial “Alash-Orda” movement was predominantly Kazakh, but it had almost the same progressive-reformist Muslim, pro-human rights agenda of Jadidism and adopted social-democratic ideas.⁸² Jadids and Alash-Orda activists and intellectuals believed in the evolution and reform of Islamic scholarship, Muslim culture, and tradition. The Jadids encountered many formidable obstacles, especially the conservative religious leaders, poets, and the community tended to reject them. For example, the religious poet Nauan Khazret, who is well known in the Syrdarya region of Kazakhstan, castigated the Jadids, calling them mutazilats of their time who had strayed from the true path.⁸³ The conservative co-religionists, the primary opponents of Jadids, even tried to engage with colonial Russian authorities to fight them.⁸⁴

Jadids accepted that all Islamic sciences were actual construction of human activity and contingent. For example, Musa Jarullah Bigiev, a leading Jadid theologian, pushed for epistemological reform by defending the emancipation of reason and the need to reassess and reinterpret the fundamental concepts like, “What is Islam in a new age?” (significantly, he argued that Islam is whatever good done for the sake of humankind), “Who is Muslim?” “What is justice?” Bigiev eloquently defended gender-egalitarian approach and inclusive Islamic theory (the theory of God's all-inclusive forgiveness) based on clearly articulated rationalistic epistemology and ethical objectivism supported by empathy.⁸⁵ Though Bigiev was confronted with strong backlash from many conservative Muslims, the Jadids like Mufti Rizaitdin Fakhretdin supported and defended his views.⁸⁶

For Jadids, the spirit and purpose of religion, its benefits (“masalikh”), and goodness (“manafi”) for human beings were much more important than dogmas, the external form, and rituals.⁸⁷ The freedom of human beings and the fullness of their choice in all their actions, determined by reason, is a great rule of life. It is a great gift from God and a huge blessing.⁸⁸ The book of Bigiev, exegesis called “Fiqh-al Quran, represents a unique example of Jadids' epistemology of understanding Quran. This exegesis embodied almost all major principles of this reformist movement: the rejection of blind imitation and absolutization of tradition, adherence to “modern scientific approach and methods,” human (needs)-centeredness, Islamic rationalism, focus on social justice, and religious inclusiveness.⁸⁹

Critical thinking played a prominent role in the vision of the Jadids and the Alash-Orda intellectuals, in their education and religious reform, and in their literary works. For example, the reformist Kazakh scholar

⁸¹ Borisova, “Our Traditions.”

⁸² Rychkov, “Borolis;” Koigeldiev, *Alash*.

⁸³ Gylmani, *Zamanımızda*, 194.

⁸⁴ Khalid, *The Politics*.

⁸⁵ Bigiev, *Zhenshchina*; Bigiev, *Rakhmat*.

⁸⁶ “Professor Taufik.”

⁸⁷ Zarirov, “The Humanistic,” 34.

⁸⁸ Khayrutdinov, *Musa Jarullah*.

⁸⁹ Zarirov, “The Humanistic,” 33.

and poet Shakarim posits, “Even if it is claimed to be the words of the prophet and greatest saint said, I do not accept them if my reason does not accept.”⁹⁰ He defended rationalistic Islamic position by declaring that, “A person who does not use reason in understanding religion is like a beast, by mis-comprehending the true meaning of the Qur’an, mullahs call me an infidel. However, the Quran says many times “use your intellect and reason.” Those who destroy the precious nature of Quranic exegesis by negating reason, annihilates Quran also.”⁹¹

Alikhan Bokeikhan, a political leader of the Democratic Party of “Alash” and later the chairman of “Alash Orda” government, in the article “Coffee House Surat,” based on a free translation of Tolstoy and published in the reformist newspaper “*Qazaq*” in 1913, critically examines the dogmatic and exclusivist views of all major religions and emphasizes the inclusive reason-based humanist position.⁹²

The Jadids and Alash-Orda intellectuals wanted self-determination from colonial powers. They demanded not only equal rights but also the inherent right of self-determination, the right to determine their own future and live by their own unique set of values.⁹³ Self-determination, the aim of the Jadids and Alash-Orda intellectuals, was also about women’s rights and gender equality. In essence, the holistic and empathetic attitude to self-determination means recognizing also the individual human right to self-determination and accepting the universal dignity of human beings. Especially after the start of World War I, the Jadids defended gender equality as a part of their anticolonial struggle and reformist agenda. Gender equality has broader cultural, social, and economic benefits; therefore, the Eurasian Muslim reformist scholars and intellectuals supported gender equality or at least serious advancement of women’s status in Muslim society. In general, Jadidis emphasized the fundamentality of the “woman question.”

Many Jadids tried to achieve legal equality and equal opportunity by providing secular education for girls and fighting against harmful traditional norms and practices. The reform-minded scholar and poet Shakarim, for example, who served as a judge in Semey, became known for making court decisions in favor of women seeking their rights.⁹⁴ Shakarim empathetically wrote, “If you abuse or oppress someone, you do not have true faith. Even if it means that you have worshipped for a thousand years, the rest should be a criticism of your shaky, corrupted religion.”⁹⁵

We argue that by the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, Jadids’ general approach to the “woman question” was focused on achieving legal equality and providing women with secular education as a necessary step for the renewal and progress of the nation. For example, the First Congress of Muslims organized under Jadids’ leadership in Spring 1917 declared the political equality of males and females, which opened the way for the overall education of girls and full participation of Muslim women in public life.⁹⁶ Also, the political agenda of the Kazakh “Alash” movement and its short-lived democratic government had an explicit gender-affirmative nature.⁹⁷ Hence, Jadids and Alash intellectuals conceptualized the connection between gender equality on the one hand and cultural change, political development, and economic development on the other hand.⁹⁸

The Jadids and Alash intellectuals were not stuck in the trap of “unthinkable,” and hence, they did not have an empathy gap caused by rigid puritanical understandings, holding, inter alia, that Sharia is unchangeable. They wanted to develop human (needs)-centric religion and the Muslim Eurasian culture, which would be compatible (in today’s terms) with the core values and principles of human rights. The leading Jadid and Alash intellectuals developed a robust discourse for women’s rights and a systemic critique of the patriarchal nature of women’s oppression. They also sought to reform and fundamentally transform patriarchal culture.

⁹⁰ Shakarim, “Syr soz.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Bokeikhan, “Din Talasy.”

⁹³ Rychkov, “Borolis;” Koigeldiev, *Alash*.

⁹⁴ Sydykov, *Shakarim*.

⁹⁵ Shakarim, “Syr soz.”

⁹⁶ Daulet, “The First,” 25.

⁹⁷ Yeralyuly, “Qazaq;” “91 Jyl burin.”

⁹⁸ Koigeldiev, *Alash*.

They believed that male-dominated interpretations and patriarchal culture obscured the true essence and power of the Quran and Islam.⁹⁹ The Eurasian Muslim reformists wanted to produce “authentic views on Islamic gender equality.”

Following Zubovich’s¹⁰⁰ analysis of the development of the universality of human rights discourse among ecumenical Protestants in the mid-twentieth century, we argue that the Jadids and Alash intellectuals created a religious, intellectual, and literary tradition with a distinctive language of the dignity of the human person. Moreover, it can be posited that Alash intellectuals and the Jadids could be more attentive to injustice and more empathetic and understanding of women’s rights because of their own colonial position since they themselves were in the position of second-class people of the empire. A contextual reading of the Jadids legacy can show that they sought to develop what can be called “human (needs)-centric” religion, traditions, and culture.

6.3 Transformation of the Conservative Habitus Through Empowering Education and a New Literature Fostering Empathy

In general, cultural and religious reforms aim to transform habitus by creating a distinct social and cultural habitus. The most important instruments are education, literature, art, and new religious interpretations. In order to create a different sociological habitus in the Eurasian Muslim communities, the Jadids and the Alash-Orda intellectuals relied on several instruments. The most important were the creation of a corpus of new literature in vernacular languages of Turkic and Persian origin (their most notable literary works aimed to promote justice, empathy, and critical thinking) and a new educational model, tentatively described as “friendly to children’s developmental needs” that encouraged critical thinking.

Jadidism emerged as an educational movement that established schools with new, more child-centered curricula. Alash intellectuals also became directly involved in education, social sciences, and humanities. Notably, leading Alash members Zhussupbek Aymautov, Akhmet Baitursunov, and Mirzhakip Dulatov sought to develop and promote child-centric, nurturant parenting, and education models.¹⁰¹ Akhmet Baitursunov, who served as Minister of Education in the Alash-Orda government and founded the modern Kazakh grammar, urged that “first of all, we must start repairing and rebuilding our society with the education of our children, because the most of our shortcomings and problems will only be eliminated if we build a new model of education.”¹⁰² In particular, Aymautov and Baitursunov designed and introduced children’s right-friendly education models (similar to contemporary Nordic ones) in the early twentieth century.¹⁰³ Also, although Aymautov, who authored one of the first academic books on psychology in Kazakh, did not use the term habitus as such, he noted frequently about the fundamental importance of the nurturant, emotionally positive environment for a child’s healthy development. He stated that only this kind of parenting and education can change the negative habitus of the colonized society.¹⁰⁴ Aymautov stated that the erosion of empathy in society is both a cause of colonization and a result of colonization.¹⁰⁵

In April 1917, the leaders of the Alash organized a congress in Orenburg (also attended by leading Jadids such as Munavwar Qari and Fatih Karimov), at which the issue of education was at the top of the agenda. The delegates proclaimed compulsory education for boys and girls and that education must be accessible (one school per hundred households).¹⁰⁶ In Summer 1917, the Alash leaders established a 2-year teacher’s course in Semey, the eastern center of the Alash movement. The teachers designated nine courses as the most necessary

⁹⁹ Bigiev, *Zhenshchina*; Khayrutdinov, *Musa Jarullah*.

¹⁰⁰ Zubovich, “Christianity.”

¹⁰¹ Zhussipbek and Nagayeva, “Strictness as.”

¹⁰² Baitursynuly, *Kop tomdyq*, 480.

¹⁰³ “Finlandiya.”

¹⁰⁴ Aymautov, “Qazaqtin.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Koigeldiev, *Alash*, 224.

(compulsory) and four courses called unnecessary, which included the Arabic language, Islamic history, religion, and measurement.¹⁰⁷ On the whole, the analysis of the views of the Jadids and Alash intellectuals on parenting and education can show that they accepted the universality of the needs of the child and the laws of child development.

Notably, the seminal works of notable Jadids and Alash intellectuals were dedicated to nurturing empathy and women's rights. For example, the first four major Kazakh novels were all about women's fate in a patriarchal society. Moreover, it can be argued that the first books, in the native languages of the Eurasian Muslims, published in the early twentieth century, were dedicated to women's rights. For example, the central theme of Myrzhakyp Dulatov's (who authored also the famous anticolonial poem "Wake-up Kazakh people!", the first edition of which was immediately confiscated by the Tsarist Government) book *Unfortunate Jamal* was the powerless and voiceless status of women in patriarchal Eurasian Muslim society, who was undergone multiple colonizations. This novel tells the story of a young woman who became a victim of the patriarchal-feudal system that ruled in the conservative Central Asian society. Kazakh literature critics note that the novel was written with deep compassion, empathy, and hope. Another Alash intellectual, Akhmet Baitursunov, praised this work; the first edition was published in 1910 as the very first novel in Kazakh.¹⁰⁸

Analysis of the books of Musa Bigiev shows that he developed both gender-egalitarian and inclusive Islamic interpretations driven by empathy and justice. Particularly, he emphasized that there cannot be gender bias in creation and that God calls to man and woman equally without distinguishing in gender. Specifically, Bigiev's book *Woman: Under the Light of Holy Quran* was written with empathy, care, and affection for women. To challenge the widespread patriarchal stereotype that woman is allegedly the "source of vice," Bigiev, in his exegesis of the Quran's ayat (2:30), specifically emphasized that the concept of "fasad" (immorality, vice, a fall of morals) used in the Quran in the speech of angels only refers to "men." And when your Lord told the angels: "I will place the ruler (caliph) on earth," they said: Will you put on it who will create discord ("yufsidu") on it and shed blood?" The verb "to cause vice, discord," which comes from one root with the word "fasad," has a clear masculine form.^{109,110} We may suppose that Bigiev's interpretation might indicate that the empathy of males compared to females is more likely to be eroded because of their social context.

Moreover, in this book, Bigiev empathetically claimed that women shed rivers of blood to keep the lineage going, what can be considered the greatest "jihad" (striving for the cause of God) and the greatest type of worship that men cannot perform.¹¹¹ Also, in clear opposition to the widespread in patriarchal cultures attitude to regard the period's blood as impure and dangerous, he wrote that the woman's holiness increases in the days of monthly bleeding.¹¹² His other statement shows his deep affection for women, "a man is only a throne on which a reigning woman should sit."

Mukhtar Auezov was one of the few Alash intellectuals who survived the Stalinist purges, and he was one of the founders of modern Kazakh literature. In the public discussions on the political, social, and cultural issues of Kazakh society during the period of the formation of the Alash-Oda government, he eloquently advocated women's rights. In 1917, he published the article "It is Woman Who Has Laid the Foundation of True Humanity," in which he eloquently pointed out that "it is woman who has lifted man from the level of the beast (who was ready to fight, kill, and colonize others) to the level of humanity, therefore society will reach happiness and the true level of humanity only when the stinking fog over woman's head clears."¹¹³

Alikhan Bokeikhan, the political leader of Alash, was probably the staunchest advocate of women's rights in the Eurasian region in the early twentieth century. Under different pseudonyms, he published many materials, including the translations, about women's rights issues in the periodicals published in Kazakh and Russian.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Mirza, "Alash Ziyalylyary."

¹⁰⁸ Nurgaliuly, "Bakhytsiz Jamal."

¹⁰⁹ Bigiev, *Zhenshchina*, 60.

¹¹⁰ Khayrutdinov, "Sokrovishchnitsa Arabskogo Yazyka."

¹¹¹ Ibid., 56.

¹¹² Ibid., 55.

¹¹³ Auezov, *50 tomdyq*, 22–4.

¹¹⁴ Bokeikhan, *Shygarmalary*.

In summary, the Jadids and Alash intellectuals used every possible medium to raise awareness of the need to transform education (which implies also the awareness of children's rights), to develop women's rights, and to change the dynamics that sustain conservative and patriarchal habitus. Education reforms and the publication of books, journals, and newspapers were crucial in this regard. By means of achieving the "national and religious liberation" that would eliminate the oppressive and unequal power relations in society, including the oppression of women and children by patriarchal culture, they wanted to transform the conservative and patriarchal Eurasian Muslim habitus. However, the cultural capital of the Jadid and Alash leaders was largely lost among today's Eurasian Muslims as a result of the systematic destruction by the Soviet regime, as evidenced, among other things, by the reproduction and internalization of authoritarian, paternalistic social norms, and religious interpretations after a century has passed since the emergence of these reformers and efforts to implement their ideas.

Overall, the intellectual and spiritual legacy of the Jadids and Alash-Orda intellectuals sheds light on the potential of Islamic rationalism to develop gender-egalitarian interpretations and the universal dignity of the human being. The anticolonial and progressive ideas of these empathetic Muslim scholars and intellectuals can offer crucial insights that are not alien or foreign (as many conservative Muslims may mistakenly accept gender equality and even the notion of human rights) to implement the humanistic Islamic and decolonial approach of contemporary progressive Muslim scholars. The conservatives' attempts to uphold the authoritarian patriarchal Islamic norms and patriarchal culture through the prism of Jadids and Alash intellectuals can be seen as anything but a justification of oppression and coloniality, even as "anti-Islamic." Ultimately, however, resistance to the gender binary and hierarchy that define patriarchal manhood and womanhood stems from our human nature to be inherently relational and responsive beings.¹¹⁵

7 Transformation of the Conservative and Patriarchal Habitus: the Synergy Between Children's Rights and Women's Rights and Contribution of Empathetic Child-Centric Parenting

While political reforms and socio-economic policies are important measures that can help realize women's rights and build a more inclusive and egalitarian society, it is also important to change the conservative and patriarchal habitus of Muslim communities (which embeds the social norms and thinking styles that normalize authoritarianism and patriarchy) through reforms in education, new approaches to the arts, and new interpretations of religion. This is primarily the task of internal actors in the fields of education, literature, and theology, such as the Jadid and Alash-Orda intellectuals, who wanted to bring about these transformations in Eurasian Muslim communities in the early twentieth century.

Deficiency of empathy is more about culture or social context than innate preferences.¹¹⁶ However, positive emotional parenting and development of critical thinking are constituent elements of the concept of children's rights. Ethics of care suggests that the psychological trauma of disconnection is the defining emotional feature of patriarchal masculinity.¹¹⁷ This means that resistance to patriarchal culture and norms lies in the development, reconstruction, and rediscovery of empathy, which is under the threat of erosion and impairment. In other words, understanding the reasons for the prevalence of conservative Islamic interpretations (which is a lack of empathy, among other things) can at the same time be seen as a way to offer solutions. As mentioned earlier, our logic to transform the conservative and patriarchal habitus can be illustrated as follows: Ensuring the foundations on which a child develops empathy and critical (independent) thinking – creates an empathic (and nontraumatized) child; this child is less inclined to a conservative and authoritarian

¹¹⁵ Gilligan and Richards, *The Deepening*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Gutsell and Inzlicht, "Intergroup Differences," 597.

¹¹⁷ Wilmer, "Empathy as Political."

mindset; the more such citizens there are in society – the stronger the demand for gender egalitarian religious interpretations. Raising an empathetic child, especially boys, is a consequence of respecting their child's rights, and as Wegner posits, we need empathetic boys to accept gender equality in society.¹¹⁸

The importance of child-centric models of parenting and education fostering empathy and critical thinking in developing human rights and raising awareness about inclusiveness should be explored in future research. In essence, one of the critical indicators and underlying factors overlooked in research on conservative religions, gender inequality, authoritarianism, and democratic development is the observance of children's rights, parenting styles, and other factors that affect the development of empathy. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to analyze concepts such as erosion of empathy, the Dark Triad, narcissism, collective or group narcissism and childhood trauma in order to understand various political, social, and religious phenomena. It is alarming that authoritarian parenting and education styles, characterized by a lack of dialog and positive emotional development, which are still prevalent in many conservative societies (as well as neglectful styles), impair, erode, and even amputate empathy and create a serious empathy gap.

To summarize, to reconcile human rights and Islam, it is essential to develop children's right-friendly parenting styles and education models that can change the conservative and patriarchal habitus. They are essential in order to implement the ethics of care. Following Bobbi Wegner's logic,¹¹⁹ we argue that it is important to raise kind and happy boys who have enough self-awareness and security not to hurt others or themselves. In other words, caring, children's right-friendly parenting, creates a masculinity of such self-assurance that males have no insecurities to have to prove themselves through dominance or controlling anyone.

8 Conclusion

An important assertion of this article is that gender-inclusive interpretations can be sought and gender equality can be achieved – if empathy (by developing it from childhood) becomes the foundation of society, social relations (through humanistic, child-centric models of upbringing and education), and, of course, religion in the twenty-first century. Overall, one way to reconcile the concept of human rights and religion is to nurture and cultivate empathy, which is a basis for the acceptance of universal human dignity, from early childhood. Moreover, empathy is a key component of social change, and empathy generates the courage to do the right thing.¹²⁰ Importantly, empathy is unrelated to being religious or not as such, but it is related to how people interpret religions.¹²¹

The idea of the innate universal nature of the child, as conceptualized by Montessori, is needed not only to prove the crucial role of empathy in personality and social development (which is about the universal by its nature children's right-friendly parenting or child-rearing) but also to legitimize universal human dignity, gender equality, and the development and practical implementation of gender-egalitarian religious interpretations. Therefore, resistance to patriarchy in Muslim communities can be seen as a central struggle for universal human dignity – “impulse to democracy and human rights grounded not in ideology but in what might be called human nature: in our neurobiology and our psychology.”¹²² Also, as the reformist Islamic intellectuals affirm that, “Muslim women own their God-given rights by the simple virtue of being human” and that “the Muslim community as a whole cannot achieve justice unless justice is guaranteed for Muslim women.”¹²³ However, to paraphrase Wegner,¹²⁴ there are very real, deep-rooted problems in Muslim societies

¹¹⁸ Wegner, *Raising*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Duriez, “Are Religious.”

¹²² Gilligan and Richards, *The Deepening*, 4.

¹²³ Safi, “Introduction,” 10–1.

¹²⁴ Wegner, *Raising*.

because the well from which the sons of many Muslim families drink is polluted and infects them. And it is crucial to clean the well from the ground up. This is why the future of Islam is primarily to raise empathetic boys, and why we have deliberately chosen to analyze the Jadids and Alash intellectuals who were empathetic male intellectuals, reformists, and educators.

Transforming the patriarchal-conservative habitus through the cultivation of empathy and the development of critical thinking will reduce the demand for and popularity of patriarchal religious interpretations and pave the way for the spread of gender-egalitarian and inclusive interpretations already produced by reformist Muslim scholars, but currently still disseminated and internalized by a relative minority represented by highly educated groups of Muslim intellectuals and activists. The liberating and empowering spirit and message of the Qur'an and Islam, the religious foundations of a nonpatriarchal ethics of care and a human right-friendly Islamic epistemology, can be found in the restoration and revitalization of empathy (and one of the ways to achieve all these is through the development of children's right-friendly parenting and education).

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