

Transforming Understanding of Women's Rights in Kyrgyz Madrassas

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Education is a key element in shaping the worldview of the next generation and determines society's core values, ideology, and basic understanding of human rights. While Kyrgyzstan is a secular state, Islamic education, backed by Arab and Turkish sponsors, continues to increase in popularity with the construction of thousands of mosques and dozens of new Islamic educational institutions. Young women have become an important target for Islamic ideology and Islamic educational institutions seek to introduce a new type of ideal woman who is obedient, submissive, and modest. This research uses curricula content analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with teachers and students to examine the effects of newly introduced Islamic education institutions and concludes that the schools are succeeding in training female Kyrgyz students for sheltered lives of dependency, threatening to fundamentally erode women's rights in the country. Two tasks thus demand the attention of policymakers: preserving Kyrgyzstan's secular state and introducing new interpretations of the Quran, which strengthen support for women's rights among believers.

Keywords: Women's rights, discrimination, Islamic education, secular education, secular state universities, Muftiayt, Quran.

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Islam represents a major stronghold of patriarchal values in modern post-Soviet Central Asia and a strong influence on women's rights. Unlike the Kyrgyz government, which has no clear state ideology regarding the role of women, the Muslim community has developed a successful plan for influencing Kyrgyzstani women, who have become an important target for Islamic ideology. The involvement of girls in madrassas, Islamic institutes, and Quranic courses has become a strategic task of the Muftiayt¹ and Muslim clergy in Kyrgyzstan. In an interview, the former Mufti Chubak aqy Jalilov emphasized the importance of attracting women and girls to study in madrassas in order to transmit Islamic values to their children. The policy has dramatically increased the number of female students in Islamic educational institutions each year.²

What are the key objectives of Kyrgyz madrassa administrators regarding the education of young female students? Have they succeeded in transforming the thinking and behavior of their students and how has this affected the prospects for women's rights in the country? To answer these questions, research was undertaken in the form of participant observation of the teaching process, content-analysis of curricula and teaching materials, and extensive structured and semi-structured interviews with the founders, key administrators, teachers, and students at Islamic educational institutions throughout Kyrgyzstan.

The results indicate that the madrassas aim to teach girls a view of gender relations in which men are considered superior to women, with women required to be obedient and serving in the subordinate roles of mother and wife. Girls are taught to focus on their biological status and preparation for family life. Training within these institutions relies on rote memorization of written material and neglects critical thinking skills. Interviews clearly demonstrate that training at Islamic educational institutions had altered the thinking and external behavior of female students. Most demonstrated obedience and obsequiousness and lacked concrete future plans other than to marry and serve husbands, children, and relatives. If left unchecked, this rise in Islamic education threatens to erode the rights and opportunities of Kyrgyz women and undermine the country's future human, social, and economic developmental prospects.

¹ Muftiayt is the Kyrgyzstan Spiritual Board of Muslims, which appeared immediately after collapse of Soviet Union and Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991. Prior to this Muslim leaders of the former Central Asian Soviet socialist republics created a Muftiayt in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) in 1943 which was known as the Central Asian Spiritual Administration of Muslims (SADUM).

² From the author's field research material on "Islamic Education and Muslim Students Life in Kyrgyzstan" conducted with the CARTI Program from 2012 to 2014.

The Historical Background of Women's Rights in Kyrgyzstan

Three distinct periods mark Islam's influence on women's rights in Central Asia. Prior to 1917, traditional patriarchal culture dominated and Islamic values crushed any expression of women's rights. From 1917–1991, when emancipation and liberalization of women comprised a major goal of the atheistic Soviet government, the everyday influence of Islamic values was confined to rituals of weddings, childbirth, children's anniversary celebrations, boys initiations, and funerals, and didn't have a significant influence on the rights of women (at least not among Kyrgyz and Kazakh people). From 1991 to the present, the revival of Islam as a national identity and the return of patriarchal values to everyday life brought a new stage in discrimination against the rights of women.

During the first period, Islam regulated everything for sedentary Central Asians, from what to wear to what to think, and included the veiling, segregation, and passive social role of women. As a rule, active economic life and regular interaction with men prevented women in nomad tribes from covering their faces, making it impossible to create a separate female space inside of the yurta (nomadic home) off-limits to non-related men, or to strangers. The nomadic way of life deprived imams and the mosques of influence. Nevertheless, Sharia and adat³ regulated the lives of all Central Asian Muslim women before the socialist revolution in 1917, discriminating against women's rights. All the norms of Islamic family law were practiced, including polygamy, underage marriage, guardianship, bride price (kalym), and slave status for young brides. For example, the living conditions of Muslim women of Turkestan⁴ were probably severe enough to warrant becoming a subject for a discussion in the Russian State Duma (Parliament), which was published in 'The Turkistan Courier' in 1909. A group of Muslim deputies in the State Duma had opposed a bill that would have provided women with inheritance rights equal to men, arguing that according to the Qur'an, Muslim women could receive only half the amount of men.

Progressive deputies countered that: "It is impossible to be convinced by the reference to the Quran. Modern life has advanced too far beyond the time in which all human relationships were only regulated by spiritual and religious laws. Civil and secular laws have been established and religion has gained by freeing itself from the minutia of life. The same applies to the Quran, which recognizes a woman as inferior to a man. The female peasants of Russia, including Tatars, Bashkir and other tribes that practice Islam, are «eternally caring,» diligent workers, bearing not only the burden of

³ Adat, translated from Arabic, means custom, and is a collection of traditional pre-Islamic legal practices of Muslims in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and is not reflected in the Sharia.

⁴ During the 19th and early 20th centuries, all Central Asian peoples were included in the Turkistan autonomous province of Imperial Russia.

educating children but also housekeeping duties at home and work in the fields. They don't need to prove that they deserve equal rights as men, including inheritance. Women in general, of all regions and states, are people, the same as the men with whom they form families, tribes, and states. Any self-respecting man must also respect the wife, mother, and daughter whom he loves. To improve the family, and through it the state, it is necessary to equally ennable both family members – the woman and the man. Muslims must understand this reality and let go of old religious delusions when women were considered dirty slaves” (Mirmamatova 2014, 151-152).⁵

During the second period a new form of state organization, state socialism, transformed the lives of Central Asian women. Socialist ideology called for the construction of a new social order based on social equality without gender and national prejudice, regardless of the cultural characteristics of traditions and religions. To build a new state and unite all people and ethnic groups, the Soviet government tried to overcome religious diversity with a common language (Russian) and an areligious belief system (atheism). Maria Louw (2007) writes that in spite of ideological pressure, everyday Islam survived as an important symbol of national identity for Central Asians, and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (1998) even claims that women acted as the chief keepers of Islamic values during that period.⁶ Thus, the emancipation of women was one of Soviet ideology's most important objectives. Education enabled women to take on an active social and economic role. The early stages of emancipation were particularly difficult for Muslim women, many of whom were killed or crippled by close relatives for removing head coverings or participating in meetings. The monument of Urkuya Saliyeva in Bishkek is dedicated to the struggle of Kyrgyz women for their rights. Saliyeva became the first woman to head a collective farm and was killed along with her husband by fellow villagers for supporting the emancipation of women.

The advancement of women was promoted through repeated amendments to the Soviet state constitution in 1918, 1924, 1936, and 1977, which expanded the rights and freedoms of women, supported their participation in socially useful activity, provided systems of protection and support for mothers and children, and continuously expanded educational and professional opportunities. The Soviets opened thousands of kindergartens, schools, after-school daycare classes, and hospitals with ambulance services. The Soviets achieved the major goal of making Soviet Muslim women the best educated and most independent in the Muslim world regarding social, economic, and professional choices and outcomes. The Soviet government's provision of societal, economic, and cultural rights provided a real wall of safety for each woman.

Kyrgyzstan has now entered a third period, in which women's rights have collapsed

⁵ The author's translation.

⁶ Although Tadjbakhsh incorrectly ignores specific details of the period.

with the fall of the Soviet government. Women are losing rights in all spheres, including family life, and within society. While Kyrgyzstan remains a secular state, its weak government completely lacks a clear state ideology, enabling Arab and Turkish sponsors to build thousands of mosques and open hundreds of Islamic educational institutions. The Arabic veil, known as the hijab, previously never worn by Kyrgyz women, has grown in popularity. Islamic educational institutions and mosques during Friday prayers are fully revising and restricting women's rights and introducing a new, or we should say 'old,' ideal image of women as obedient, submissive, and modest, and needing a man to provide safety.

The introduction of the market economy, rising poverty, and resurgence of Islam have reduced the social status and eroded the rights of women in Kyrgyz society. First, socio-economic changes related to the transition from a planned to a market economy weakened women's standing. In the early years of independence, the state completely forfeited its responsibility to provide material and financial support to families or to preserve guarantees of employment and free medical care. The unregulated market began to dictate the allocation of resources according to its principle of «might makes right.» Women, along with pensioners, children, and the disabled, turned out to be the most vulnerable link in society.

The buildings and property of former daycare nurseries, kindergartens, and many schools passed into private hands and were closed off to much of the population. Many children remained at home, which forced women to give up work to care for children. Pensions, unemployment, and disability benefits went practically unpaid. Many fathers, accustomed to the state bearing paternalistic responsibility for each family and child, lacked the experience, skill, and knowledge to become entrepreneurs and provide for their families. Poverty, domestic problems, and divorces surged, with women as the victims of divorce. Forced to fight alone for the survival of their families, the most vigorous women launched their own shuttle businesses, traded in bazaars, and joined the NGO movement. Some embarked on a path for God, although most believers were men.

The political structure of Kyrgyz society completely changed. A new ideological foundation for a social welfare state has yet to develop to replace socialist ideology. NGOs were the first to begin work in this direction, demanding that the state take appropriate measures to support pensioners, children, the disabled, and, of course, women. NGOs first raised questions about the rights of women in Kyrgyzstan, about their neglect by public authorities, and about their participation in social projects and governing. NGOs were the first to address the accepted practice of domestic violence, which continues to grow with alarming momentum. The issue of building a social welfare state and restoring women's rights only emerged in the 2000s, with the appearance of new political parties like the Social Democratic Party. In response, the

Islamic clergy and a new generation of believers preaching Islamic patriarchal values have arisen in active opposition to women's emancipation and rights.

Religion quickly filled the ideological and spiritual void created by the disappearance of Soviet Marxist-Leninist materialist-atheistic ideology following the democratic proclamations of freedom of conscience. New religious laws in 1991 unleashed a religious revival. Early on, active Christian proselytizing, a new phenomenon for the traditionally Muslim Kyrgyz, led to a sudden growth in the number of Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists, among others. With the advent of the Muftiayt, the Muslim Spiritual Board, Islam began to play a very active role as well. Muslim believers were also able to utilize political representatives who advocated for believer interests.

During initial field research from 2002-2004, the author was surprised by the large numbers of believers attending Friday prayers at the main mosques in Kyrgyzstan's major cities: 4,000, 6000 to 8000, and 14,000 believers, in Karasu, Osh, and Bishkek respectively. During the holidays of Kurban Ait and Orozo Aita, Muslim prayers were held in Bishkek's main square, Ala-Too, located between the government White House and the parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) with the number of attendees doubling from 35,000 believers in 2002 to 75,000 in 2012 (Seitalieva, 2005). Seeing Islam's growing popularity, every Kyrgyz president, along with many members of Parliament, felt compelled to participate in the prayers.

In addition, the number of mosques has grown rapidly, from none in 1990 to 2,000 in 2002, and 3,500 in 2014. The number of madrasas in Kyrgyzstan has also grown exponentially, especially in comparison to its Central Asian neighbors, to sixty times that of Uzbekistan in per capita terms.

Table 1. Islamic Educational Institutions in Central Asia per Capita

	Islamic Educational Institutions	Population (millions)	Institution per million population
Uzbekistan	11	33	0.3
Kazakhstan	13	18	0.7
Tajikistan	1	9	0.1
Turkmenistan	0	6	0.0
Kyrgyzstan	120	6	20.0

Source: Sanjar Eraliyev. "Kakova rol' gosudarstva v religioznom obrazovanii? (What is the role of the state in religious education?) *Azattyk Radio Central Asia*, March 11, 2019, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29814446.html>

In the midst of this Islamic revival, a growing number of young people, even in secular universities, primarily identify first as Muslims rather than their nationality. Up to 79% of AUCA (American University of Central Asia) students identify as Muslim, compared to between 84% and 85% at other universities (National State University, Bishkek Humanitarian University, Kyrgyz-Turkish University “Manas, Osh State Technological University), despite the conventional wisdom of the Kyrgyz as ambivalent Muslims (Segal and Seitalieva 2010, 37-47). Moreover, the Muftiayt is offering believers even more madrassas to meet the growing population’s demand for Islamic education. Proclaiming universal equality, the secular Kyrgyz state has avoided interfering in madrasa activities, thus contributing to a perpetuation of conservative gender norms.

Literature Review

Recent literature documents this rise in conservative Islam and radicalization in Kyrgyzstan since independence and links it to a system of madrassas dependent on funds from more conservative religious organizations abroad. The poor condition of madrassas has also forced students abroad where they are more likely to become radicalized. Recent studies also show a related rise in anti-female attitudes, gender discrimination, and the erosion of women’s rights. While studies have explored Islamic education’s effects on Islamic values in Kyrgyzstan, little qualitative work has examined the effect of madrassas on attitudes towards women, a gap which this study seeks to fill.

Numerous studies (Chotaev 2016, Hölzchen 2017, Jalil 2017) point to a rise in Islamic religious institutions, increased identification with Islam, and an increased threat of radicalization in Kyrgyzstan since independence. In fact, a 2016 Kyrgyz government State Commission for Religious Affairs (henceforth SCRA) study revealed that political activities of religious organizations had incited religious hatred and discrimination, infringed on religious freedom, and produced social radicalization and extremism.⁷ Nazira Kurbanova (2014) identifies the young as the driving force behind this Islamic radicalization. Other reports (Jalil 2017, Bulan Institute 2017, Hölzchen 2017) identify two different mechanisms through which the growing Islamic education system has led to “the radicalization of society, the spread of ideas of religious extremism. Unchecked by the state, Kyrgyzstan’s madrassas have become increasingly dependent on funding from foreign Islamic sponsors from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, and Turkey, which instituted conservative Islamic educational models within Kyrgyzstan

⁷ Large-scale research discovered widespread radicalization: 66.9% of the population indicated a “danger of extremism in the religious sphere” (Chotaev 2016).

(Chotaev 2016, Bulan Institute 2017).⁸ Furthermore, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education has encouraged the process, signing an agreement to open an Islamic Academy in Kyrgyzstan fully funded by Saudi Arabia to bring Wahhabi curricula, textbooks, and teachers to the country.⁹

Numerous studies have noted that the poor quality of Islamic education in Kyrgyzstan has led to the departure of hundreds of young Kyrgyz to foreign Islamic educational institutions where they often undergo radicalization before returning to Kyrgyzstan (Malikov 2010, Achilov 2012, Chotaev 2016, CSR AUCA 2010, FREaCAIR 2010). The conditions of some madrassas are so poor as to be right out of the “middle Ages” without tables and with students “forced to study on their knees, spreading rugs” (Bulan Institute 2017, 6).¹⁰ According to the Bulan Institute, for students who study abroad “there is a real danger of being recruited abroad into the activities of extremist organizations and upon arrival in Kyrgyzstan, they may well become distributors of their ideologies and policies” (Bulan Institute 2017, p. 3-4). Abramson (2010) noted that “citizens who received religious education abroad [bring] with them the mentality, norms of behavior, clothing, traditions of the countries where they studied.” Religious radicalization in Kyrgyzstan is to some extent influenced by foreign religious extremist centers and organizations (Bulan Institute 2017, 24; Government of the Kyrgyz Republic 2014). Once in Kyrgyzstan many of them “organize secretly operating communities of believers (hujira), which disseminate religious beliefs unusual for Central Asian countries...[such as] religious radicalization” (Kurbanova 2014, 109). Many find work as teachers in madrassas, Islamic universities, and hujiras and are employed by the State Commission for Religious Affairs and in other governmental offices.

Nevertheless, some scholars such as Stephan (2010) view Islamic education as a means of bringing morality to the masses, to provide “society’s youth with good manners and morally good behavior” (Hölzchen 2017, 120). Dilshod Achilov also sees high-quality Islamic education as an effective tool against the influence of various extremist and radical groups on young people (Achilov 2012, 105). Both pro and anti-madrassa sides agree though that “the creation of a high-quality system of Islamic education should play a key role” in resolving the problem of radicalization (Kurbanova 2014, 103-104).

The issue of gender equality is one of the most sensitive in Kyrgyz society. While older and middle generations of Kyrgyz women experienced gender equality in the

⁸ The Bulan Institute noted that “Pakistani madrasas have been heavily criticized for the influence of various dubious movements on them.” This point of view was also shared by the press secretary of the Muftiate Loma Azhy, who was then removed from his post.

⁹ The agreement with the Saudis contradicts the Constitution and Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, which prohibits Wahhabism in Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰ The Bulan Institute is an independent organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

socialist era, they have faced discrimination after gaining independence. The dominance of men and the secondary role of women in the Islamic gender sense have led to an increase in violence against women. Osmonova (2018) details a decline in women's rights, a rise in domestic violence, sexual harassment, the sale of women for sexual and labor coercion, and an increase in early marriages and polygamy. Seitalieva (2020) describes the rise of nationalistic movements such as Kyrk Choro, which seek to limit choices available to women and curtail their civic engagement. A study by the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan 2020 finds that one-third of Kyrgyz women are subjected to daily domestic violence and only 17% of women are able to participate in decision-making processes.

Research reveals a rise in gender discrimination during the period coinciding with the increase in religious identification. Many researchers write about bride kidnapping. On the one hand, bride kidnapping violated the laws of Islam, but it is through the nikke¹¹ ceremony that such marriages are consecrated. This ceremony became popular with the revival of Islamic identity. It takes place with the participation of a moldo-Muslim clergy (mullah). Until now, there has not been a single case when a moldo would refuse to conduct a nikke for newlyweds. Officially, only marriages by mutual consent continue to be registered by the state. Yet, Russell Kleinbach (2005, 198-199) estimates a significant increase in the number of women forced into marriage through bride kidnapping with the independence of Kyrgyzstan, with the proportion of women abducted increasing from 64% to 85% from 2001 to 2004, including a rise from 43% to 75% percent in the 16-25 age group. He estimates that 45% of all married ethnic Kyrgyz women were forced into marriage through bride kidnapping. Bride kidnapping, which is an abuse of civil and human rights in violation of international and local law (Yerzhanova 2017) has become common practice today. "Some local leaders argue that this practice is a cultural tradition" but non-consenting bride kidnapping is "a form of gender-based violence" (Werner 2018).

Finally, polygamy, which is closely related to Islamic ideology, is another phenomenon that has become a symbol of discrimination against women's rights and has been studied by Michele Commercio (2015, 2020), Juliette Cleuziou (2020), Lori Handrahan (2020), and Anna Cieslewska (2017). Michele Commercio (2020) finds that "the case of Kyrgyzstan suggests that the cultural value of marriage and motherhood - traditions that endow women with a communal identity, with power and prestige - may induce a woman to accept [a] second wife role." Undoubtedly, while marriage has traditionally been associated with higher social status in Kyrgyzstan, contemporary

¹¹ Nikke is a religious ceremony for the consecration of marriage among Muslims and is conducted by Moldo, a Muslim clergy. State registration of the marriage becomes optional and the girl's consent is not required.

Polygamy is closely related to the spread of Islamic ideology. In general, though, attitudes towards polygamy, with the exception of religious men and women, remain negative in Kyrgyz society. Handrahan (2020) highlights the importance of gender and its relevance to the democratization of society in modern Kyrgyzstan. Women's rights, though, have always been important in Central Asia, with the greatest achievements in the era of Soviet power. With the present Islamization of Central Asia, however, some women must be emancipated anew.

While many studies show the effects of Islamic education on radicalization, few examine the role of madrassas on views of women and women's rights. Many questions related to the effect of madrassas on gender remain unanswered. For instance, how much has the curriculum and teachers at these institutions influenced student principles, beliefs, and attitudes about citizenship? How are teachers at madrassas interpreting the Qur'an's view of women's rights during lectures and discussions? How has this affected the teachers' and students' understanding of women's rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, employment, and the right to self-realization? Particularly lacking is an analysis of the content of courses and research in the madrassas themselves, using participatory observation and in-depth interviews of the teachers and students.

Methodology

To answer these questions, this study conducted field research to examine the curricula and textbooks and observe Muslim student behavior and attitudes at 15 Islamic educational institutions and three theological departments across Kyrgyzstan. Students were interviewed to reveal their thinking, motives, values, as well as their feelings and understanding of democracy, secularism, and women's rights. Among 55 madrassas in Kyrgyzstan, 15 madrassas were selected for study according to their regional coverage in the northern and southern parts of the country, long history, and popularity. Since educational institutions are traditionally located in the northern part of the republic, and not all southern madrasas permitted research, the study covered ten educational institutions in the north and five in the south. However, a study of 9 out of 10 northern Islamic educational institutions¹² revealed that their main contingent of students originated from the southern regions.¹³ In contrast, none of the southern madrasas

¹² All students of the Mustafa madrassa in Tokmok are Dungans who traditionally live in the northern regions.

¹³ The presence of southerners owes in part to a general flow of migration beginning in the 1990s from the south to the higher living standards and better job prospects and educational opportunities in the north. As a result, southern immigrants make up the main contingent of believers and often send their children to be educated in the madrassas.

had students from the north. Regional origin plays an important role in Kyrgyz identity, and the southern region has been known for strong religious convictions. In fact, even in the north, the vast majority of founders, administrators, teachers of madrassas, and representatives of the Muftiyat, had southern roots.

The study undertook a comparative analysis of the curriculum at the Islamic University in Bishkek (IUB), Theological Departments of Kyrgyz-Turkish University “Manas” in the north, Osh State University in the south, and the “Arashan” branch of Osh State University in the Chui region. The main methods included participant observation of the teaching process and of students’ lives and analysis of curricula and teaching materials, including their authors and content. The author attended classes, listened to lessons, and during breaks conducted unstructured interviews with over 40 students at Islamic educational institutions about their motives for attending the madrassa, their worldview, values, and attitudes toward the secular state, democracy, and women’s rights, as well as about their future plans. The material provided the researcher with a view into the students’ understanding of their reality and how they interpret the events that take place in their life.

Structured interviews with the founders and key administrators at madrasas provided insight into the use of particular disciplines and curriculum. Many excluded secular subjects such as biology out of opposition to Charles Darwin’s theory and viewed philosophy as a source of skepticism and heresy regarding issues of faith. In general, most adhered to the position of Saint Augustine - “I want to know just God, and nothing more.” Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were used with other teachers and administrative personnel to ascertain the goals of the Muftiyat.¹⁴

Additionally, observation and reports were provided from the author’s third and fourth-year students at the Philosophy Department of the International University of Kyrgyzstan, who interviewed students at the madrasas. Together with students, the author conducted two focus groups, at Talas University in the Talas region and Jalal-Abad Commercial and Constructing University in the southern Jalal-Abad region. Also, to ascertain the government position, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three representatives of the Kyrgyz Republic’s State Agency on Religion Affairs, three members of the Kyrgyz Parliament, and three religion experts.

¹⁴ This included four members of the Muftiyat, three deans of Theological Departments, 21 administrative representatives of madrassas, Islamic Institutions and Islamic University in Bishkek, and 32 teachers.

Case Studies

The Madrasa Curricula

In contrast to students at secular universities, those at Islamic educational institutions receive a purely religious education. Male and female students not only study separately but also study different course subjects. While students of male and female madrassas must earn 81 credit hours to graduate in three years, they are required to study different subjects. For example, males in the male madrassa “Az Zahra” study sixteen religious and three secular subjects¹⁵ while females in the “Aisha Siddika” study eleven religious and two secular subjects.¹⁶ The greatest attention in both is paid to the Quran, Arabic language, and Fiqh (Friday prayers).

Although the curricula of Islamic University students requires twenty-four religious (including the History of Religion) and three secular subjects (Psychology, Computer Science, and Russian), the author discovered that Psychology was not offered and that History of Islam had been substituted for the History of Religion. Male students are required to earn 170 credits over four years while female students earn 140 credits over three years. The main program of study includes the Quran, Hadith, Arabic, and Fiqh. Male students also study Russian and Computer Science, which are not offered to female students.

At secular universities, in contrast, to earn a Bachelor’s degree students must earn 240 credits from a standard curriculum. Female and male students in Theological Departments must attend the same courses for the same credits and study together. Only 8 of the 34 subjects are religious, and English is compulsory. Electives tend to focus on secular subjects. While Islamic University students are not required to write term papers and theses,¹⁷ the Manas University Theology Department allocates 14 credits for the theses, which must employ the scientific method and be defended.

One of the most unexpected discoveries of this field research was the complete restructuring of gender relations in Islamic educational institutions, including the restoration of the old, traditional, patriarchal understanding of women's rights. In personal conversations teachers and students expressed their sincere belief in the high status and respect for women in Islam. Such a contradiction in the understanding of women's rights in Islam lies in the very sources of Islamic law - in the Quran and Sharia.

The following selected examples of individual observations and interviews in short

¹⁵ Kyrgyz language, Informatics, and Physical Culture.

¹⁶ Kyrgyz language and First Aid.

¹⁷ None of the administrators at any of the Islamic educational institutions understood the purpose of writing term papers or theses, most likely because religious education does not seek to teach research methods and scientific methods required for writing term papers and theses.

form illustrate how the content of teaching subjects and the classroom environment at the madrassa discourage female students from independent, logical, and critical thinking instills values of dependence and obedience towards traditional authority figures, parents, and husbands, and directs female students away from fulfilling independent goals and towards the family.

The views of Muftiayt authorities, Islamic educational institution graduates, and employees about gender issues

Interview with Chubak azhy Jalilov

Chubak azhy Jalilov graduated from the Islamic University when it was a madrassa and from Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, one of the most prestigious universities in the Islamic world. Chubak azhy headed the Muftiayt from 2010 to 2012, and served as a member of the Council of Ulema Muslims of Kyrgyzstan and the Ahli Sunna World League of Scholars, becoming one of the most famous and popular theologians in the republic.¹⁸ An Islamic university lecturer, Chubak azhy emphasized the importance of attracting women and girls to madrassas to transmit Islamic values to their children, as the Muslim clergy's main strategy to rapidly spread Islamic values throughout Kyrgyzstan.

Interview with Zhamal Frontbek kyzy

Zhamal Frontbek kyzy is an Islamic University graduate, famous religious public figure in Kyrgyzstan, and founder of the 15,000 member strong, public association "Mutakalim,"¹⁹ which seeks to fight for the rights of Muslim women. Zhamal wrote the first charter of a women's madrassa in 1996. Zhamal and all of her employees undergo continuous religious education and training, and train others throughout the republic at branches in Osh, Jalal-Abad, Batken, Naryn, Balykchy, and Karakol.

Zhamal considers her most significant victory gaining permission for girls in secular schools to wear the hijab, and the legalization of photographs of women in headscarves in 2007. Mutakalim received the United Nations International Jonathan Man Prize and is a member of the UNIFEM religious council and the Federation of Muslim Women. With cooperation from Kuwait, Mutakalim funds over 1,300 orphans and teaches girls,

¹⁸ Chubak azhy Jalilov announced that he was going into politics, but died of coronavirus in 2020 at the age of 45.

¹⁹ Zhamal explained the meaning of the word "Mutakalim" as the eloquence of the Almighty. The second meaning of the word is dialogue between people.

boys, and their mothers in Sharia.

Zhamal views the Ministry of Education ban on wearing the hijab in schools, universities, and government agencies as the main violation of women's rights in Kyrgyzstan. She argues that the Ministry is placing its charter and the national constitution above the believer. While Soviet atheistic ideology persists, she claims, the number of believers is growing daily.

The problem of unemployment of madrassas graduates, Zhamal remarked, has forced men abroad and made polygamy more attractive to women. Less-educated women are easy prey for radical organizations, including Hizbut-Tahrir, Wahhabism, and Akromiyya, and make for convenient distributors of religious literature and fanaticism. According to Zhamal, while men are lazy, women persist to the end and will become a "torpedo" in the hands of radicals. A woman caught with prohibited literature is viewed as less threatening and is less likely to be beaten by police.

Regarding polygamy, Zhamal replied, "It exists in the Quran and we can do nothing about it. Of course, polygamy is desired by men. Here a woman can do nothing against her husband." She added: "Polygamy is officially prohibited, but under the sharia law - nikke can be used to create a second and third wife. According to Sharia law, women do not desire a lover. They desire a husband who can provide housing, food, and can support the children. For this, Kyrgyz women will accept polygamy and are ready to stay home and solely focus on their household. A woman only needs children and a breadwinner. Polygamy has actually become very common, especially in the cities, where men have more opportunities to earn money and can support several wives." Moreover, Zhamal insisted that even some wealthy women supported polygamy: "I know many businesswomen, who have everything, but no husband. To satisfy their physical needs, they are ready to become a second or third wife, even according to a weekly schedule, on Mondays, or Thursdays, etc. Today we have many such secular women." Zhamal believes that Kyrgyzstan is an eastern country, so it is especially important for women to have a husband, regardless of the official law. In any case, sharia is the official law for all Muslims, regardless of country.

Thus, Zhamal views the ban on wearing the hijab in schools, universities, and state institutions as the main form of discrimination against women in the republic, and does not see polygamy as a problem, as it complies with the requirements of the Quran and Sharia. The problem, she insists, is the absence of an official law to legalize the many polygamous families which exist in Kyrgyzstan.

The assembly hall of the Bishkek Islamic University. Friday is a day when female students have an open lesson. The hall is crowded with girls invited from other higher education institutions.

The main speaker is a man who graduated from this university and now runs his own small business. He describes himself as a very active dawatchy,²⁰ devoting three months a year to dawat. He provides a detailed description of his life and how he became a pious Muslim and then turns to gender: “Allah divided us into men and women, each with their own duties. I, for example, cannot even warm up a ready-made meal for myself at home. I must wait until my wife makes it, which is her duty. I, for example, cannot iron my shirt by myself. My wife should do it for me. We men are the getters. Of course, women have the right to work, but only in gentle professions, as teachers or doctors . . . But they should not do a man’s hard work. Allah did not create them for this purpose. Unfortunately, everything is mixed up now. Men cannot support their wives and drink alcohol. These men who are incapable of supporting their wives and children are not men at all. They are mankurts.²¹ Their wives are forced to do any job they can find and some leave for Moscow to earn money. Without husbands, they commit adultery. In this world women and men have different missions.” He also reiterated that a “woman is obliged to wear hijab if she considers herself a true Muslim.”

Interview with the Ali Ibn Aby Talib Islamic Madrassa’s director, Talas city

“The women’s program at a madrassa differs very little from the men’s program. The main subjects coincide and the same teachers train both men and women. We teach girls more about what is necessary for their family life. About seventy percent of our girls marry before finishing their studies and all of our girls are sure to get married. Of course, we don’t know if they will become ideal women but their attitudes towards parents, relatives, and others change and improve through their training with us. All of our courses provide moral education, which are lessons from the Quran, Hadiths, Sharia, and other sources.”

Interview with the director of the “Aisha-Siddika” madrassa, Tash-Bulak village, Jalal-Abad region

Madrassa “Aisha-Siddika” is one of the most famous and popular women’s madrassas in the Jalal-Abad region. When asked why girls choose his madrassa, the director emphasized with special pride that their girls were in great demand among potential suitors. All interviewed teachers remarked that the top priority for girls was to get married and serve their husbands. The director explained that since girls are spoiled by the influence of modern Western culture, the parents often bring them to the madrassa after 9th grade to rescue them from moral decline. Many students also intentionally

²⁰ A dawatchy is a Muslim missionary who spreads the faith. Dawat is to proselytize.

²¹ A mankurt is one who has lost his memory.

choose a new path and actively recruit their friends, relatives, and acquaintances to the madrassa. Girls only drop out when getting married, even to husbands that do not allow them to leave the house after marriage.

The director said he did not allow 14-year-old girls to get married, but generally, in the southern regions, parents often give their daughters in marriage at this age and younger. While official registration is illegal, the moldo (mullah) will conduct a nikke (Muslim) marriage. The moldo is uninterested in the couple's age, since the father, or another close male relative, determines the girl's marriage. The family's material difficulties, the size of the kalym (bride price), education of the parents, religious convictions, and views on marriage often influence the age of the bride. The director evaded a question about whether married men have approached the institute. While he personally opposes polygamy, he said, the choice solely depends on the woman herself.

Interview with the deputy director and teachers of the Islamic institute “Quran Nuru (Quran’s Beams), Kara-Balta city

“We dream that all women will begin wearing the hijab and then the world would immediately be better and happier. Besides, what do we call a woman who does not cover her head – secular. What does that mean? Only that she lacks morality and knowledge of Islam. She has no clear idea about how a woman should behave.”

In response to questions about polygamy, all ustazas (teachers) agreed that polygamy is authorized in Islam. “But the husband has to maintain equality between his wives. If he does so, he can have up to four wives. Yes, there are official secular laws. But we Muslims submit to Sharia law.”

In response to questions about divorce through talaq:²² “It is necessary to understand why a husband divorces his wife. Nothing happens without a reason. If his wife is pious and obedient, if she correctly treats her husband, children, and relatives, she will never have problems with her husband.”

Interview with a female, named Ustaz, at an Islamic institute named after Khażreti Usman, Alekseevka village

Ustaza is very young and graduated from this institute. Initially, she was very reluctant to talk to me, repeatedly asking if the administration had given me permission to talk to her, and only after receiving direct permission from the vice-rector did she agree to speak with me. She remained guarded throughout the short and dry conversation. Ustaza

²² Talaq is the husband's right to dissolve the marriage by simply announcing to his wife that he repudiates her. In Kyrgyzstan, divorce denies the former wife and children of financial support.

teaches the Quran, Arabic, and Sarf to female students and hopes that her husband will continue to grant her permission to teach. If he forbids work, though, she will obey and stay home with the children. She became obedient, she says, after attending this institute as a student. Her husband supports their family as a worker. Their institute is popular with girls, she says, and mainly teaches religion and iman (moral behavior) not secular subjects. The segregation of women, she insists, will lead to fewer spoiled girls and a better society. The main goal of Islamic educational institution graduates should be to spread Islamic knowledge. At the moment, Ustaza has no goals other than serving Allah by teaching girls.

Observation of teaching at the Islamic University in Bishkek

Lesson on "Hadith", first-year female students group

The ustaz (or teacher) is a woman. She dresses in a hijab. All students wear hijabs. All girls sit with their feet closely squeezed together. Sitting in a relaxed pose or with legs crossed is considered vulgar.

Having read a little of the Hadith (a record of the Islamic prophet Muhammad) in Arabic together with girls and discussed its value, the ustaz begins to describe and explain paradise. Her story is similar to a fairy tale. Paradise contains everything necessary and all desires are instantly granted. The desires she mentions resemble those on earth, such as eating and drinking. She speaks casually about paradise and the girls listen very attentively. Some are surprised and gasp. One student asks whether it is necessary in paradise to wear a hijab. The ustaz answers: "Yes, moreover all clothes there are in seventy-layers." One of the students is concerned. The teacher reassures her, "You don't need to worry about being too hot there. It is cool enough. The clothes are so light and transparent that you can see liquid flowing through your veins and see the workings inside your body. Everything looks as though you were looking at an X-ray."

The next girl asks about the grooms: "Can we choose our husbands there?" The ustaz assures her that "There you will immediately know whom you love, and you will eternally be with the elected. In this life, though, you must behave modestly. You should hide from the eyes of men. The more you disappear, the quicker you will be called to marriage. Some think they will find their husband at a disco or they dress up, wear make-up and walk the streets, but nobody takes them to marriage. Marriage is destiny and only Allah can send us our destiny. If he decides not to send you a marriage, what can you do? You will never get married. But if you believe in Allah, ask for happiness, and carefully hide from the eyes of men as if you were mice, you will be called to marriage."

The “Fiqh” lesson with a group of first-year male students

Ustaz-man explains the purpose of the Friday prayer and every detail of its performance. He lists those who should read the Friday prayer, including healthy men and free citizens. Those who need not read it include women, children, the sick, the blind, and the disabled. In response to a student's question as to why women need not do Juma namaz.²³ Ustaz replied, "Because they are subordinate to their husband. If her husband performs Juma namaz, it also blesses the woman. She doesn't need to attend Juma prayer."

Observation of a female student's class

The first, most noticeable aspect of the female students at IUB is the hijab. All girls are required to wear a hijab, which is a two-layered, wrapped scarf, with one layer wrapped under another. The first layer covers the upper forehead and hair, and the second, coming down from above, closes around the neck. All students wear long dresses or skirts to the ankles and are dressed very modestly in clothes made from inexpensive synthetic fabrics. To all appearances, they come from poor families. The majority don't use makeup and look very natural with only one girl slightly using eye shadow. Despite completely being hidden by the hijab, when you look them in the face, you see their appeal and their natural beauty streams through. All of them are very friendly and smiling, and in them a kind internal light is visible. At least, they give this impression. All possess female charms of tenderness and humility. I noticed how all of the girls sit during lessons. Even their pose emphasizes humility, sitting while holding their feet closed with parallel legs, with only one or two modestly crossed feet in a field of ankles. This pose is immediately evident. Having observed the humble sitting posture, I consciously tried not to deviate from IUB's norms. I wear a scarf during research, but in comparison, my perfunctory scarf too obviously hung from my head as a formality. After a few minutes of sitting in a humble pose, my feet naturally came back to the position. I began to reflect on the direct connection between the body and mind. Humility of the mind generates humility of the body. The converse is also true, submission and humility of the body can be used as a means of training the mind to be obedient. The whole system and methodology of teaching girls is aimed at breaking their independent spirit and thinking²⁴

During the break, girls created a noise like chirping birds. Two girls sat closely together at the next desk nestling near to one another, two friends firmly holding hands.

²³ Juma namaz is Friday prayer which is obligatory for believers.

²⁴ This reminded me of the change in consciousness in George Orwell's book 1984.

Quite clearly they are very close friends, as close as friends come. They also reminded me of two birds nestled together, sitting on a branch. Both learned the Quran, reciting in loud voices, but this apparently, did not disturb anyone.

Observation of a male student's class

The male students occupy the entire first floor of the educational building. Most are clean-shaven and look similar to students at secular universities. Only a few wear Muslim caps and beards. The appearance of male students at the Islamic University is now very different from the first students in 2002, who all wore Muslim caps, with Pakistani-style long shirts, trousers, galoshes, and overgrown beards.

The appearance of male teachers has changed as well. With the exception of Chubak azhy, who always wore a chapan²⁵ and turban, the rest of the teachers wore suits and white shirts, without caps. Most were clean-shaven. Apparently, the university's policy had changed, and men were also allowed to pray without covering their heads, in contradiction of my understanding of Islam.

Male students behaved freely and even insolently in class. No modest postures and humble behavior were observable. They immediately bombarded us with questions as soon as we entered the classroom. What was the purpose of our visit, what were we looking for, they asked. The girls would never ask such questions. Students don't stand when the teachers enter and greet teachers while sitting. Male students actively asked questions during the lesson.

Interviews with female students at the Islamic University in Bishkek

Interview with Tangiza, age 17

Tangiza, who was born and raised in Bishkek, was brought to the Islamic University by her father, a religious man who reads namaz²⁶ five times a day. Her secular mother, a fashionable woman, does not read namaz and has never worn a scarf. Tangiza and her mother constantly clash over Tangiza's study at an Islamic university and wearing of the hijab. While her two older brothers are secular, like her mother, the youngest, like her, adheres to conservative religious views. The family is thus divided between believers and secularists. Tangiza only regrets that she is no longer allowed to practice judo. She had previously attended a sports club with her father and two older brothers and had

²⁵ A chapan is a quilted robe worn in medieval Central Asia.

²⁶ Namaz means to pray.

been city champion, but the hijab now prevents her from practicing judo. When asked if she regretted choosing this path, she replied that it was more likely no than yes. Now that she has put on the hijab, there is no turning back.

Interview with Upol, age 18

Upol hails from the Osh region and currently lives in a hostel in Alamedin. Financial backing from Arab sponsors allows the Islamic educational institutions to provide free room and board for female students at a special hostel. Upol studied well at school but has had difficulty at the Islamic University, and especially with Arabic. Upol relates that of the 180 girls to enter the university with her, only 22 remained. The others all dropped out to get married. Upol does not think about her future. Maybe if she learns Arabic, she will become a translator. She will marry as soon as she is called. She is also accustomed to the hijab. Without it, she feels naked. And in any case, how can one read the Quran without a hijab?

Interviews with female students at the Madrasa "Aisha-Siddiqा"

Aisha-Siddiqा is the most famous female madrassa in Jalal-Abad with an initial September enrollment of 300 girls. By the time research was conducted in November, though, the number of enrolled girls had fallen to 240. More than sixty had managed to marry in just two months. Teachers explained that marriage was the most important goal for the girls and also the reason for the madrassa's popularity. Parents brought their girls to the madrassa in the ninth grade to preserve them from moral falling through exposure to Western culture. All the girls of Aisha-Siddiqা were required to wear identical gray hijabs. The director of studies explained that wearing the hijab had become popular throughout society and that girls ignorant of Islam with impure thoughts often wore hijabs for the purpose of getting married. To separate their students from such girls the madrassa's administration selected a particular hijab for Aisha-Siddiqা students.

Interview with Rozia, age 17

"I learned about the madrassa from my girlfriend and arrived here at age 15 with support from my parents, both of whom were believers. Everything here is pleasant for me. I do not desire any change and feel close to Allah. All of my course subjects are pleasant and the ustazas are very well prepared and treat us politely. Secular studies may be necessary for life, but we took them for nine years in school, which is more than enough. I got married forty days ago. The first time I saw my husband was when he

approached me with his parents to ask for marriage. My parents told me that he reads the prayers of Mohammad, and I gave my consent. This is the most important criterion for a Muslim girl. I have no special dream in life, but with my husband's permission, I would like to work in a madrassa as ustaz. If he disapproves, I will sit at home. Each girl here must wear a hijab so that nobody except for her husband and close relatives can see her body or hair. It is therefore necessary to be covered. The woman's most important role is to educate her children and care for her husband."

Interview with Malika, age 20

"Here I was taught that a Muslim woman must behave. The West now influences Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz want to be similar to Western people. But this contradicts our basic mentality. What is the meaning of the word love? The highest level of love is the love of Allah and of his Messenger, and then love towards parents. The love between a man and woman appears after marriage. This I deeply believe. We cannot fall in love or meet one another before marriage. I will therefore love, respect, and obey my husband."

Interviews with female students at the Ali Ibn Aby Talib Islamic Madrassa

Interview with Nurgul

"The prophet told that we must hurry to do three things: read the prayers of Mohammad, bury the dead, and for a woman at the appropriate age, marry. Marriage rescues a woman from bad behavior, from corrupted thoughts or acts. While it would be desirable to continue studying, Arabic language, for instance, I must nevertheless correctly raise my children. My husband must be devout and go on dawat. As for polygamy, it is a difficult matter. I am very jealous, but if Allah demands, I will agree to this. Our teacher has explained that first we must find love of God, then of our parents, and finally of our husband. A husband, moreover, is even closer to us than our parents, so it is better to follow his desires than to quarrel with him."

The revival of Islamic ideology in Kyrgyzstan offers to women a man as a reliable wall and maintainer. Only a small percentage of men are able to serve as reliable walls for their wives, however, but in exchange, they demand full submission and obedience. Most walls, unfortunately, are fragile. The Islamic education system function as one of Aldous Huxley's (2014) conveyor belts, 'replicating' men and women. The Islamic patriarchal ideology of male superiority and female inferiority becomes an organic part of their self-awareness.

Discussion of Results

The research reveals that the curricula and rote memorization employed by Islamic educational institutions are geared towards training young women for passive and obedient domestic lives rather than to fulfill independent goals and the interviews demonstrate their effectiveness in changing the behavior and thinking of female students. The Muftiayt and clergy seek to increase the number of Islamic educational institutions and female enrollment in order to cultivate a new generation of believers able to financially support Islamic institutions and in the process undermine women's rights. As a corollary, field research also revealed that most of the Islamic educational institutions opened under foreign sponsorship, a fact left undisclosed by the schools. The Muftiayt see the madrassas as the key to expanding future congregations and donations and seek to open a madrassa in almost every mosque.

The number of Islamic educational institutions has grown in Kyrgyzstan from one Islamic University, seven Islamic institutes, and 55 madrassas with 4,565 students in 2012 to dozens of institutes, 92 madrassas, and over 10,000 students, almost half female, by 2021 (Government of the Kyrgyz Republic 2021). The research reveals that the curricula at these Islamic institutions is succeeding at training women for lives of passive obedience within the home rather than imparting critical thinking skills needed for professional success. Since 2013, the government has required Islamic educational institutions, consisting of madrassas and the IUB, to include a small handful of secular subjects within the curriculum such as the History of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz Language, Physical Culture, and Cooking for girls. Most training within these institutions is doctrinaire and relies strictly on rote memorization of books and written materials, denying students the opportunity to hone critical thinking and perception. Girls are taught to focus on their biological status and preparation for family life. Most interviewed teachers agreed that men were superior to women, with men financially obliged to provide for their wives and children while women serve the roles of mother and wife. Women are required to be obedient and subordinate and to serve their husbands as lord. During interviews, none of the teachers or students remembered that the Islamic tradition of polygamy is illegal in the secular state of Kyrgyzstan.

The interviews clearly demonstrated that the training of Islamic educational institutions had affected the thinking of female students. Most lacked concrete future plans other than to marry and serve husbands, children, and relatives. They displayed a willingness to passively submit to a subordinate social role and were uninclined to develop themselves or their interests. After one year of brainwashing, significant changes in the girl's thinking and behavior were observed. Obvious shifts in external behavior demonstrated obedience and obsequiousness. After training, their appearance, gestures, and submissively bowed head said, "Here am I, obedient and ready to carry

out all wishes of my lord – my husband.” They started to believe that women were inferior to men.

Unlike the older and middle generations raised under official Soviet atheism, who remain able to critically evaluate religion, Kyrgyz youth exist within an ideological void with malleable minds susceptible to indoctrination. The youth are largely ignored by the state elite, who are primarily concerned with power and money. The youth also constitute a growing portion of the Kyrgyz population, accounting for almost 60% of the population. The Muftiayt and clergy hope to target female students with new madrassas to indoctrinate future mothers who will raise and educate the next generation of pious believers.

Islamic educational institutions, therefore, pose a new challenge to secularism as well as to the security and basic understanding of women’s rights in Kyrgyzstan. Islamic educational institutions are spreading religious fanaticism and patriarchal values throughout Kyrgyz society, seeking to completely revise gender relations. Female hijab-wearing students see serving men as their only calling, obediently accept the concept of polygamy, and remain ignorant of the secular state. They instead consider their duty to live according to Sharia law. In this view, women are primarily understood as biological animals rather than as equal human persons. Women’s rights and freedoms are subordinate to the hijab, which Arab sponsors and Muslim clergy so diligently try to place on the heads of Kyrgyz girls, who embrace it in the hopes of finding family happiness and an indestructible husband who will provide everything.

Conclusion

Interviews and content-analysis of curricula indicate that Islamic educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan seek to alter the behavior and thinking of young women, training them for passive and obedient domestic lives, as part of a strategy to raise a new generation of believers able to financially support Islamic institutions and in the process undermine women’s rights. This rise in Islamic education threatens to harm Kyrgyzstan’s future human, social, and economic developmental prospects. As Muhammad Ahsan’s (2012) study shows, non-Muslim countries consistently record higher levels of socio-economic performance than Muslim countries with equal economic indicators and levels of income (Qatar vs. Spain, Egypt vs. Ecuador, etc.), which he argues is due to gender discrimination. Ahsan points out that in terms of gender under development “whether it is male or female literacy rate, life expectancy or employment, the situation is poorer in Muslim countries when compared with non-Muslim ones” (Ahsan 2012, 51).

The perception in Islamic ideology of women as inferior and incapable of bearing social, economic, and political responsibility evidently undermines human development.

A large number of Islamic educational institution graduates lacking specialized professional skills or a normal education will give rise to increased unemployment. The graduates themselves are already sounding this alarm. Married female graduates end up locked at home, prohibited from social activity or further studies at secular schools, colleges, and universities. They are unable to acquire skills that would enable them to find a job or open their own business and are restricted to being wives and mothers. Islam allows a patriarchal husband to obtain his most important goal: a slaving wife who agrees to a minimum cost of living.

The discrimination against women associated with the rise of Islamic educational institutions also threatens to undermine democracy and undermine the socio-economic prosperity of Kyrgyzstan. An undereducated religious mother will raise undereducated religious children, and demand more madrassas, leading to fewer scientists and an under-development of the natural sciences, mathematics, engineering, and advanced technology. The republic's economy will remain stagnant, unable to develop modern production and agriculture, and rely on imports of food, machinery, and technology, exacerbating the conditions of international dependence the country presently experiences (Zhou 2020). Increasing levels of youth unemployment will lead to a downward spiral of deepening religious fanaticism and even less space for science, philosophy, and modern art. The government of Kyrgyzstan must therefore adopt a new policy concerning Islamic educational institutions and mosques in the country, restricting their growth to a financially sustainable number while exercising strong control over curricula and ideologies disseminated from mosques.

Women's rights in Kyrgyzstan must be preserved through the promotion of girl's education, encouragement of women's rights within Islam, and preservation of the secular state. Each person can feel happy only when they possess freedom and are free from outside pressure. But freedom also needs to be taught, since in a patriarchal society children become accustomed to pressure from their parents and the older generation. Adults in any society live their lives under the pressure of many external factors: generally accepted rules, laws, socio-economic and political reality. At the same time, freedom is an inalienable state of human existence and nothing must prevent a person from moving towards their freedom, giving them the self-confidence that they are the master of their own destiny. Girls, therefore, must be educated about human rights, to learn and remember that they are free people worthy and able to satisfy their needs for self-development and self-expression.

If Islam is recognized as part of the cultural identity of the Kyrgyz people, the government and Islamic institutions must actively back interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah in support of women's rights. Women must be recognized not only as mothers and wives, but first and foremost as individual persons, a view strongly supported by modern progressive Muslim lawyers and feminists. Finally, the secular state must remain

as a major bulwark of human rights. While religion plays an important role in national identity and cultural values, secular laws are necessary to uphold human rights.

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