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The "Woman of the East" and Soviet Orientalism. Rethinking the Soviet story of women´s "emancipation" in Azerbaijan in the 1920s-1930s

Yulia Gradskova*

Abstract

This article aims to explore the Soviet way of dealing with the so called "woman of the East" and to find out how much it is possible to speak about Orientalism with respect to early Soviet cultural and educational production. I explore how the "woman of the East" was constructed in different materials in Russian language focusing on the emancipation of women in the Caucasus and, particularly, in Azerbaijan from the 1920s-1930s. I am also interested in how the information about the "docile Muslim women" and women's emancipation in the Caucasus and particularly in Azerbaijan was spread abroad. In order to do it I analyze Soviet publications and films dedicated to women in Caucasus and Azerbaijan. The study shows that in spite of critique of the colonial politics of the tsarist regime, the Soviet cultural production preserves many orientalist clichés and tropes. The presentation of women in Azerbaijan as "dominated, "slaves" and "shadows" helped constructing the Russians as a whole and the Russian women in particular, as freer and more modern. According to Said, "identifying 'us' Europeans as against "those' non-Europeans" (1996, 7) is an important mechanism for producing the "west". The analyzed materials suggest that the narrative on the "backward woman" in the Caucasus was important not only for convincing the Soviet people in the important emancipatory mission of the Soviet state, but also for improving the state's image in the "West" and the "East". Indeed, the Soviet emancipators were described in the publications of the "Soviet friends" as those fighting against colonialism and, at the same time, carrying out the civilizing mission similar to that of the "Western" countries.

Keywords: gender history, Soviet emancipation, orientalism, woman of the East, Caucasus

* Yulia Gradskova - Associate Professor in History, Södertörn University, Sweden. ORCID: 0000-0002-0975-5560. E-mail: yulia.gradskova@sh.se

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"Doğulu Kadın" ve Sovyet Oryantalizmi. 1920-1930'larda Azerbaycan'da Kadınların "Kurtuluşunun" Sovyet Öyküsünü Yeniden Düşünmek

Özet

Bu makale, Sovyetlerin 'Doğulu kadın' ile ilgilenme biçimini ve oryantalizmin erken dönem Sovyet eğitim ve kültür ürünlerindeki varlığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 1920-30'lardan itibaren Kafkasya'da, özellikle Azerbaycan'da kadınların özgürleşmesine odaklanarak, Rusçada 'Doğulu kadın'ın nasıl farklı malzemelerle inşa edildiğini araştırmaktadır. Kafkasya'da 'uysal Müslüman kadınlar' ve kadınların özgürleşmesine ilişkin bilgilerin ülke dışında nasıl yayıldığını da merak ediyorum. Bunu yapmak için, makale Kafkasya ve Azerbaycan'daki kadınlara adanmış Sovyet yayınlarını ve filmlerini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, Çarlık rejiminin sömürge siyasetinin eleştirisine rağmen, Sovyet kültürel üretiminin birçok oryantalist klişeyi ve kinayeyi koruduğunu gösteriyor. Azerbaycan'da kadınların 'mazlum', 'köle' ve 'gölge' olarak sunulması, bir bütün olarak Rusların ve özellikle Rus kadınlarının daha özgür ve daha modern olarak inşa edilmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Said'e göre, 'biz' Avrupalıları 'Avrupalı olmayanlara karşı' tanımlamak (1996, 7) Rusya ve Rusların 'Batı' imajını üretmek için önemli bir mekanizmadır. Analiz edilen materyaller, Kafkasya'daki 'geri kadın' hakkındaki anlatının yalnızca Sovyet halkını Sovyet devletinin önemli özgürleştirici misyonu hakkında ikna etmek için değil, aynı zamanda devletin 'Batı' ve 'Doğu'daki imajını iyileştirmek için de önemli olduğunu göstermektedir. Nitekim Sovyet özgürleştiricileri, 'Sovyet dostlarının' yayınlarında sömürgeciliğe karşı savaşan ve aynı zamanda 'Batılı' ülkelere benzer bir uygarlık misyonu gerçekleştirenler olarak tanımlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: toplumsal cinsiyet tarihi, Sovyet özgürleştiriciliği, oryantalizm, Doğulu kadın, Kafkasya

In the introduction to his famous book *Orientalism* Edward Said claimed the importance of examining “Orientalism as a discourse”. According to Said, “European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said 1996, 3). Even if Said was analyzing mainly British and French constructions of the Orient, previous scholarship showed that the Russian imperial politics towards its Eastern borderlands, in particular, the Central Asia, were quite similar to colonial politics of the European empires (Khalid 1999, Sahadeo 2007). While a detailed discussion of the pre-1917 gender constructions is not the focus of this paper, I am particularly interested in the Soviet ideology of emancipation of the “woman of the East” that represents a specific mixture of anti-colonial claims and orientalist views of the “Other” (Gradskova 2018). It is this particular mixture that contributed to the Soviet narrative of the help with civilizing and emancipation of the “backward woman of the East” after the Bolsheviks got control over most of the territory of the former Russian Empire.

The countries of the Caucasus together with Central Asia were the borderlands where the Bolshevik government met with serious difficulties in advancing their project of “Sovietization”. Indeed, nations of North and South Caucasus saw the liberal February revolution as the end of the Russian domination in the region and a possibility for building nation states. As it is known, in Azerbaijan the independent Democratic Republic was established in 1918.[1] However, the Republic was overthrown by the Red Army in April 1920 and Sovietization of Azerbaijan has started. The emancipation of women constituted an important part of Sovietization in all the former imperial borderlands, but it was the Muslim woman that was seen by the Bolshevik modernizers as particularly “enslaved” by religion and traditions. Describing Soviet modernization in the “periphery” *(okrainy)* Soviet historiography highly praised the emancipation of the “woman of the East”

[1] In 1919 the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic offered equal rights to vote in the elections to women and men from the age of 20 (Qasimova 2006).

(Shakulova 1981; Iman-Zade 1954, Gradskova 2018, 2-5; Gradskova 2020).

Many historians have already challenged the Soviet narrative of helping the "downtrodden Muslim women" to emancipate. In particular, they demonstrated that Muslims living in the Russian Empire in the beginning of the 20th century had their own aspirations and projects of modernization. Many Muslim intellectuals considered that education for women would contribute enormously to the well-being of respective nations and, not least, would help their struggle against Russification and Christianization (Kamp 2006, Khalid 1999, Makhmutova 2006, Rorlich 1996). As for Azerbaijani researchers, the publications of the Azerbaijan Gender Information Center and independent scholars have analyzed the development of women's charitable and social activity starting from the end of the 19th century. The importance of Muslim intellectuals for the development of women's education was explored as well (Qasimova& Qasimova 2006; Dzhabbarov 2012). Historian Audrey Altstadt who studied early Soviet cultural politics wrote that "sovietization of Azerbaijan brought into conflict two different visions of modernization" (Altstadt 2016, x111), one of which was developed by the local intellectuals before the Bolshevik revolution and included ideas of women's education. Farideh Heyat also showed that efforts targeted at education and emancipation of women started in Azerbaijan quite early: already in the early 1900s there were many well educated women in Azerbaijan and the Muslim women's welfare society was founded in Baku in 1914 (Heyat 2002, 69). Heyat suggested that "the establishment of a secular ethnic identity had been as much a response to pressures of competitions with other ethnic groups (chiefly Russian and Armenian) as it was due to the forces of industrialization and the impact of contact with European culture" (Heyat 2002, 55). Finally, several researchers demonstrated that the Soviet "emancipation" led to contradictory results. Indeed, according to Deniz Kandiyoti, "On the one hand, ideologically inspired celebrations of the achievements of Soviet policies spoke of dramatic progress and rapid social change. On the other hand, Soviet ethnographers

lamented the immutability of local cultures, the relative lack of penetrative capacity of the Soviet state and the resilience of local social patterns” (Kandiyoti 2009, 98).

The importance of visual art and cinematography for the Bolshevik politics is also well explored (Kelly 2001, Plaggenborg 2000, Sarkisova 2017). Catriona Kelly, for example, showed that the Soviet textbooks and posters from the 1920s-1930s contributed to transformation of the work culture, hygiene habits and leisure activities (Kelly 2001). At the same time, she convincingly demonstrated that Soviet educational materials included a lot of information that could be found in similar educational materials produced in the Russian Empire or in the European countries (Kelly 2001). Thus, it was rather a class rhetoric that made the Soviet pamphlets, posters and advice books look unique and special.

However, Soviet publications and films dedicated specifically to the people of the Caucasus and to gender dimensions of Sovietization still need further exploration. Therefore, this article aims to explore the Soviet way of dealing with the “woman of the East” and to find out how much it is possible to speak about Orientalism with respect to early Soviet cultural and educational production. I explore how the “woman of the East” was constructed in different materials in Russian language focusing on the emancipation of women in the Caucasus and, particularly, in Azerbaijan from the 1920s-1930s. I am also interested in how the information about the “docile Muslim women” and women’s emancipation in the Caucasus and particularly in Azerbaijan was spread abroad.

I start from a presentation of Soviet institutions and strategies aimed for emancipation of women in the former imperial borderlands. Then I give a short overview of how the Caucasus and the life of its women were described in the Soviet series of pamphlets that strove to emancipate the “woman of the East” (1927-1928). The second part of the article analyzes how the Soviet emancipators see the transformation of women`s lives in Azerbaijan. Finally, I explore how the woman of Azerbaijan is shown in the book published by a female traveler who visited USSR

as a foreign "friend of the Soviet Union" in the early 1930s in order to describe changes in status of women (Halle 1938).

Soviet politics of equality and the "woman of the East"

As is known, the Soviet state declared equality of all its citizens, while the communist ideology regarded the labor of both sexes as a fundamental principle of social organization. At the same time, due to a lower level of women's education and "class consciousness" they were considered in need of more time to become truly equal members of the workers' state. However, the Soviet documents made a clear distinction between "women" (those who did not need to specify their nationality, but in practice were Russian, Slavic or seen as "European") and women defined as *natsionalka, natsmenka* (a woman of national minority) or as a "woman of the East" *(vostochnitsa)*.[2] The last term corresponded mainly to those women who belonged to the category of *inorodtsy/inovertsy* (people of different origin or religion) in the Russian Empire, before 1917. In spite of the aspirations of equality, the new Soviet terms, similarly to the imperial ones, indicated othering. However, as opposed to the earlier principles of differentiation based on faith and religion, it was the attitude to modernity that stood in the center of attention now: the "women of the East" were considered to have a lower level of cultural development.

The analysis of the Bolshevik documents aimed for work among women makes it clear that the "woman of the East" was defined as a special category of women, one who demanded special attention from the Bolshevik party and state apparatus (Gradskova 2018). Already in 1921 the Bolshevik party organized in Moscow a special meeting for those who worked among the "women of the East"; the meeting was to discuss how this work

[2] Women included in this category could be of different religions – Muslims, Buddhists, shamanists. Thus, in the cases of some groups of women the definitions connected to social origin, occupation or landscape were used instead: *dekhanka* (a peasant woman, in Central Asia) or *gorianka* (for women living in the mountain regions of the Caucasus).

should be organized (Liubimova, 1958). Apart from the special communist party department for working among the women – *Zhenotdel* – it was deemed necessary to create additional institutions dealing with the emancipation of the “woman of the East”. Such a new institution was created by VTsIK in 1926, its official name was the Commission for Improvement of Work and Everyday Life of Women, but in many documents this institution was called the Commission for Improvement of Work and Everyday Life of the Women of the East *(zhenshchiny vostoka)* or “culturally backward ethnicities” *(kulturno-otstalykh narodnostei)* (GARF 6928; Gradskova 2018). According to Antonina Nukhrat[3], a representative of *Zhenotdel* in the Central Commission: “*Because the woman of the East is so enslaved (zakabalena) and so backward, these commissions are dealing with the emancipation of women”* (Nukhrat 1928, 119).

The transformation of the life of the “woman of the East” had to be organized on the scientific grounds, but the Soviet emancipators of women in the Caucasus (as well as in Siberia and in Central Asia) hardly ever spoke the local languages. The emancipation activists from Central Russia also had a very limited knowledge about women’s life in a particular region of the Caucasus. In order to learn something about the people living in the borderlands the Bolshevik center was cooperating with different research organizations and museums who organized scientific expeditions for studying the life of different ethnicities, the practice that was very similar to that of the Western empires. Women’s life was one of the issues such expeditions and studies were interested in. For example, several expeditions were organized during the summer of 1929, one of them to Georgia. The materials collected during this expedition, and especially those on women’s life in Adzharistan were published on occasion of March (GARF 6928, 1, d. 151, p. 3).

Ethnographers, philologist and historians cooperated in the projects. They would take part in the production of different

[3] Antonina Nukhrat-Matveeva was born in 1900 into a Chuvash family; worked as a teacher and held different posts in the party and government apparatus during the 1920s and 1930s.

materials that were supposed to help the Soviet activists who were sent to work with the "women's question" in different regions of the country with non-Russian population. One of the interesting examples of such a cooperation is a series of pamphlets under the common title "Working Woman of the East" *(truzhenitsa vostoka)*. It was produced by the Institute for the Protection of Maternity and Childhood in Moscow in 1927-1928 (see more about this series Gradskova 2018, 67-82). The main aim of the series was to provide information about the local populations in different parts of the former empire to doctors, nurses, *Zhenotdel* cadres, and activists dealing with the education of *natsionalka* on women's rights. The series was to include 28 pamphlets. The resulting pamphlets represented mainly the ethnic groups of the Volga-Ural region, North Siberia, Far East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The cover of every pamphlet offered an ethnographic style picture of a woman dressed in traditional clothes while the pamphlet titles were sometimes designed in Orientalized graphics; each pamphlet was about 30-40 pages long (Gradskova 2018, 67-82). These pamphlets offer a possibility to see how the Bolshevik center interpreted the life of "Other" women and how much the "revolutionary assumptions" on the "hard life of the woman of the East" were based on the publications of the traditional research made by orientalists. The pamphlets have not been analyzed by the historians yet. Therefore, in the next section of this article I will focus on the pamphlets that described the life of the women of the Caucasus and, in particular, the one on Azerbaijani woman.

The Caucasus and women`s "hard life" in the pamphlets on the "woman-toiler"

The pamphlets shared a similar design and explored and described typical occupation, buildings and family structures of the women living in the Caucasus paying special attention to the influence of religion and place of living on their status. In most of the cases the (male) authors of the pamphlets were showing that the women of one or another particular ethnicity are exploited and lack rights; the implicit positive image of women having more freedom behind these assumptions usually was an image of the

Russian woman. For example, the authors of the pamphlet on Georgian woman write that they address mainly the Georgian peasant woman. According to them, the city woman who for “more than one century had shared the same space with the Russian woman, was Europeanized” and “not very much different from the Russian city woman”. Thus, following Said, it is possible to see how definition of the Orient as “backward” and hindering women’s education and emancipation, helps to present the Russian woman as a truly European and emancipated (Khudadov & Demidov 1928, 19). Thus, the information contained in the pamphlets can be seen as fulfilling an important ideological function – elevating the status of the Russian (and other women from the central Russia[4]) and showing them to be modern and ready to share their knowledge and skills with other, more “backward” women.

The male authors of the pamphlets dedicated to the North Caucasus - Shamkhalov (writing on Dagestani woman), Berger (on Chechen woman) and Ivanovskii (on Kabardian woman) - usually started their description from a critique of the czarist colonial politics. Thus, according to Professor Berger, “the Russian government put the Chechens into a really horrible economic situation” (Berger 1928a, 14). He continues further writing that “the Chechen people who loved freedom suffered a lot under the yoke of the Russian conquerors” (Berger 1928a, 17). Shamhalov (1928, 15) stated that the heroic history of the Dagestani war against the Russian rule was never allowed to be published before 1917 due to severe censorship.

At the same time, like other publications in the series (Gradskova 2018) the pamphlets on women from the Caucasus focused on the low cultural level of the population (Berger 1928a, 17) and, in particular, on the negative role of Islam and the “barbarous” traditions (*dikie obychai*, Ivanovskii 1928, 30) that made the situation of women particularly hard. For example, describing the life of the Chechen woman, the author of the pamphlet Berger mentioned several times that Islamic traditions

[4] On the Russian inferiority complex in front of the Western empires see Tlostanova 2008.

were not fully observed by the Chechens – indeed, women did not cover their faces. Still, at the beginning of the section on women's rights, the author insisted that it is the Sharia laws that converted women into slaves in Chechnia (Berger 1928a, 21). The author of another pamphlet, Ivanovskii, described the life of the Kabardian woman in similar terms – starting from the restraining role of Islam. And even if Islam in Kabarda is described as "strange" or "mixed" while not all of Islamic norms are observed in practice (for example, seclusion) (Ivanovskii 1928, 29), the author still suggested that the Islamic norms were particularly important for understanding the situation of women in Kabarda. Ivanovskii stated that: "A woman was considered to be a person with no rights *(nepolnopravnoe sushchestvo)* in the family as well as in the society" (Ivanovskii 1928, 22).

Even if, while describing the Caucasian wars and criticizing the Russian imperial government, Berger mentioned that sometimes the Chechen women were becoming fighters for freedom *(abrechka)* (Berger 1928a, 33), still the larger part of his description of the woman's situation before 1917 was about her dependency and submission. According to Berger, the Chechen woman is a "small universal factory" that is working the whole year to produce everything necessary at the household. However, she is often beaten by her husband (Berger 1928a, 31-32). The pamphlet on Kabardian woman also stressed her role in the production of the family wealth – making cloth, milkingand working with wool were female responsibilities in Kabardian families and required a lot of skill (Ivanovskii 1928, 25).

The transformation of the women`s life in the Caucasus had to be realized mainly through new institutions like women's clubs, maternity hospitals and nurseries. Furthermore, the pamphlet on the Chechen woman stated the importance of the creation of the Chechen alphabet (Berger 1928a, 35). At the same time the emancipation was presented mainly as a fight against the local men when the Bolshevik emancipators from the center had to "take the Muslim woman from the power of man by force". Such an emancipation was described as a destruction of the traditional patriarchal power: a man would be deprived "of the property and

all material benefits it brought that he enjoyed for many centuries” (Berger 1928a, 36).

The new life of women was also presented as transformed through protection of her rights by the new legislation that outlawed bride price, bride kidnapping and polygamy that was presented as crucial for life of women in the region. Even just on the base of information published in the pamphlets it is quite clear that in the late 1920s the Soviet legislation had a very limited effect and was not followed in many districts and villages. Yet the authors of the publications were willing to believe that the most important steps on the way to emancipation had already been made. The evidence for changes in women’s status often included numbers of women judges, schools, clubs and maternity clinics. For example, in the pamphlet on Kabardian woman we read that 446 Kabardian women were judges (Ivanovski 1928, 39), that 80 women were involved in the work of the women’s club in Nalchik (Ivanovskii 1928, 38) and that Kabardian republic had already two maternity clinics and two nursery schools (Ivanovskii 1928, 43). At the same time the work against the Islamic traditions was considered to be particularly important in all the new institutions. Ivanovskii stated proudly that “as a result of working in the workshop (in the club) the mountain woman was successfully reeducated *(dostigaetsia znachitelnyi uspekh v perevospitanii ee)*” that is revealed, for example, in the fact that the participants stopped observing Ramadan (Ivanovskii 1928, 40).

The “old” and “new” life of the Azeri woman

In this section I will focus more on the Soviet presentation of the Azerbaijani women`s life. I will start with the analysis of the pamphlet on Azerbaijani woman from the series discussed above and will continue with the Soviet silent film dedicated to Baku. Recently, the silent films as mixture of ethnography and propaganda attracted attention of researchers (see Sarkisova 2017, Gradskova 2013). Thus, Oksana Sarkisova has analyzed *kulturfilms* produced by the filmstudio Vostokkino. She came to a conclusion that the *kulturfilms* had complex functions, not least, educational and commercial one (Sarkisova 2017, 34-38). The film

under analysis, "The Other life"[5] was created by a famous Soviet film director, Yurii Zheliabuzhskii, at the end of the Soviet silent films era. It is known that the film director was not very familiar with life in the Caucasus and simply used the images of Baku and female images in order to show the course of transformations in everyday life in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus seen as "the East".

The pamphlet on the life of Azeribaijani woman was written by the same author as the pamphlet on the Chechen woman. His name was indicated as "prof. Berger". The author praises the "establishment of the Soviet power" in Azerbaijan as an important beginning of transformations. The independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic is only briefly mentioned with an obvious negative connotation: the Baku proletariat fought heroically against the "bourgeois-nationalist Mussavat party government" (Berger 1928b, 15). Later on, the independent Azerbaijan is also described as being part of the Western imperial conspiracy against the revolution: the British imperialists were thinking of establishing "their colonial regime" with the help of the "bourgeois" republic in Azerbaijan (Berger 1928b, 29). At the same time the Soviet Union is described as "a true friend of the people of the East" (Berger 1928b, 5-6).

The main part of the pamphlet focusing on the woman's life starts with stating the importance of Islam for the lack of freedom for women. Similarly to the descriptions of life of women in North Caucasus, women in Azerbaijan are described as lacking rights primarily due to the dominance of Islam in the region: "in the past the masses were totally under control of the Islamic religion" (Berger 1928b, 17). Indeed, Berger reproduces all the generalizations about Islamic laws that could be typically found in orientalist descriptions of the "East": a young girl can be sold to her future husband/owner without her agreement, the man could have 4 wives at once, but he can change them as often as he pleases (Berger 28b, 18-19). Berger's descriptions of the life of Azerbaijani women are full of orientalist clichés on victimization that are a direct result of Islam. According to him, the "lack of

[5] The film is preserved in the State Archive of Photo and Cinematographic Documents in Krasnogorsk, near Moscow.

rights for the Turkic woman *(bespravnoe polozhenie)* is one of the main points of teaching of Islam” and this is the main reason that the emancipation of Azerbaijani women and other women of the East is so difficult (Berger 1928b, 30). In another passage women are described as those who “absorbed fear and submissiveness vis-à-vis the men with their mother’s milk” (Berger 1928b, 37).

In order to show how dangerous Islam can be for women, the author is ready to use and reproduce the anecdotes from the imperial past. Thus, one can read that “one Russian civil servant” (most probably of the tsarist administration) found in one village a little girl who cried because she wanted to be a boy. The author’s conclusion is: “How profoundly should this little girl feel her subjugated status that she decided to express her protest in this way” (Berger 1928b, 21).

Thus, the reader, most probably, is expected to understand from such a description that the Soviet help is the only hope for freedom that an Azerbaijani woman could have. Furthermore, the traditional culture is presented as so powerful that even the Soviet emancipators from the center experience its pressure. Indeed, according to Berger, sometimes, they even have to sacrifice their “modernity” for the sake of performing their work: “In Nukha [now Sheki] even recently the representative of *Zhenotdel* was walking through a bazar wearing a *chadra* in order to be considered a decent woman” (Berger 1928b, 33).

The pamphlet cannot avoid mentioning that some Azerbaijani women received good education before 1917, but these women (similarly to well-educated Muslim women in Tatarstan, Shteinberg, 1928) are presented exclusively as bourgeois. The inconsistency of Berger’s presentation, however, becomes obvious when the author moves to the Soviet transformation and states all of a sudden that there are many Azerbaijani women who were interested in and ready to get a university education already in the 1920s (about women’s education see also Altstadt 2016, 133). Indeed, according to the author among the 1241 “Turkic students” at the university of Baku, women constituted 26% (Berger 1928b, p. 43).

Special attention is paid to Ali Bairamov club – a new Soviet institution where all the leading positions were occupied by the Turkic women (Berger 1928b, 37). The club is described as occupying one of the nicest buildings in the city. It offered different courses, meeting places and a nursery school. However, the fact that this building belonged to the Muslim women's charitable society before the Bolsheviks took over the city, is not mentioned by the author (Heyat 2002).

Finally, without mentioning either the previous campaign for women´s rights, or women's social activism and educational opportunities for women that existed before 1917, the author declares that "In spite of the centuries long isolation from social life and knowledge, thousands of Turkic women became part of the new cultural force as soon as the first opportunity arrived" (Berger 1928b, 41).

Similar orientalist tropes could be also found in the film "The Other Life" describing the transformation of Baku. Contrary to the pamphlets written primarily for the Soviet activists, the film was aimed for a broader audience and could be used for educational purposes: it aimed to introduce the life in Azerbaijan for people living in different Soviet regions who had never had an opportunity to visit this country. Thus, for many people in different parts of the Soviet Union the visual images of this film were the first and, possibly, the only images of Baku they could ever get.

Similarly to films on other Soviet republics (Gradskova 2013) the film on Azerbaijan and Baku praises the economic potential of the region and suggests its bright future as a result of industrialization and profitable use of the oil. At the same time the cinematographic narrative suggests that this natural resource could not be used for the common good as long as the "backward traditions" persisted. Thus, the subjugated position of woman visualized through shadow-like figures fully covered by their clothes seemed to be chosen by the film producers as symbols of the "backwardness" of the past. "The old Orient is a prison for the woman, here the woman is behind the *chadra* as if behind the prison fence" – the captions read. Further the spectator learned that "all her (Azerbaijani woman's) life takes place within the walls

of her yard”. Such images help the viewer to finally forget that Baku in the beginning of the 20th century was a well-developed industrial city and submerge the audience into the orientalist visual narrative of narrow streets, the bazar as the center of life and the donkey as a way of transportation.

The Soviet reforms are shown as transforming the city and the life of its women. New Baku is presented as a very modern city; “the first in the country to have the electric tram”. A special part of the film tells the story of the training of the new qualified cadres for the industry *(fabzauch)*. We see young men and women who are studying together in the classrooms, doing exercises outdoors and working at the factory machines. All of them are dressed in clothes that should be identified by the spectators as “European”. The caption indicates that the students and workers perform their work according to the modern technologies. “When you are working your body should be in the correct position”, - one can be read in captions. Women are defined as those “Turkic women who were secluded up to a recent moment *(zatvornitsa-turchanka)*” and are shown as enjoying different occupations including giving lectures at the university. In the final part of the film, we can also see a specific perspective on development of Soviet motherhood: “working woman goes to work without being worried” says the caption. And the audience can see the kindergarten, one child in a close-up is eating, children are washing hands. [6] The youngest children are shown sleeping in the white beds symbolizing cleanliness and hygiene. Thus, similarly to the pamphlet the authors of the film imply a direct connection between the Soviet civilizing mission and the women’s emancipation in Azerbaijan.

[6] My analysis of other films on the Soviet transformation of everyday life suggests that washing hands and face is a repeating trope in the Soviet silent films. For example, Roma children in Moscow kindergarten (film *The Inspection is on*, 1931) are shown washing their hands and faces in quite a long sequence. It suggests that through washing they not only follow recommendations on hygiene, but also “wash out” the uncivilized past of their nations (Gradskova 2018).

The Soviet story of emancipation of "enslaved woman" travels to the West

In this part of the article, I am going to explore how the Soviet story of emancipation of woman in the Caucasus and particularly in Azerbaijan was spread abroad and used for the propaganda of the success of the Soviet modernization of life of the "backward people".

As it is known the Bolshevik government hoped for revolutions in other countries to come soon and expected the revolutions in colonial and dependent territories, including countries with Muslim population in Asia, to come next. The mentioned above series of pamphlets included several publications that were expected to inform the Soviet activists of women's emancipation of the situation of working woman in other Asian countries – on Persian, Afghan and Turkish woman. These pamphlets used similar rhetoric and generalized critique of Islam as the reason for the lack of woman's rights and social development. Indeed, the pamphlet on the Turkish woman described her as a "slave" similarly to the pamphlets on women from the Caucasus. However, the Europeanization of Turkey that started after 1923 is described very positively, particularly, the changes in clothing and the civic marriage (Smirnov 1927, 30-31). Finally, the pamphlet attempted to use the example of reforms in Turkey in order to rise the Soviet prestige: according to the author of the pamphlet, "the Turkish political revolution happened under the strong ideological influence and with a friendly help of the people of the USSR" (Smirnov 1927, 39).

While hopes for an early revolution in Western Europe or in the "East" did not materialize, in the 1930s the Soviet ideologists made special efforts for presenting the positive image of the Soviet Union in Europe hoping to break the Bolsheviks' cultural and political isolation. The idea of the emancipation of the woman of the East was particularly beneficial. Indeed, through showing the progress of the "backward woman", the typical trope of Western Orientalism, the Bolshevik state could present itself as a bearer of the ideas of progress and development, while the Russians could

be seen not as colonizers, but as emancipators of the women of the borderlands.

An important role in presenting the Bolshevik politics as a politics of cultural development and emancipation of the “woman of the East” was played by the so-called “friends of the Soviet Union” – Western intellectuals who were ready to popularize the achievements of the Soviet politics in the “West” (David-Fox 2012). One of such intellectuals was Fannina Halle, a citizen of Austria who was born in the Russian Empire, in Vilnius. In the 1920s she travelled several times to the Soviet Union and in 1933 published her book *Women in the Soviet Union* (Halle 1933). The book discussed the Soviet family reform and the involvement of women in politics. It was a success and soon was translated into English. Shortly after that Halle undertook new travels to the Soviet Union, this time - to Central Asia and the Caucasus and in 1938 published a new book, *Women of the Soviet East (*Halle 1938). Similarly to the first one, it praised Soviet emancipation achievements, but in this case she used a lot of Orientalist rhetoric for describing the “woman of the East” as different from the woman from Central Russia. The analysis of Halle`s book is a topic of a separate study (Gradskova 2018). Here I focus primarily on her presentation of Azerbaijani women.

A description of the emancipated woman of Azerbaijan occupies an important place in her book. She seems to be very impressed by Baku, that she describes as a “center of world’s importance, of which someone once said that it is Europe, Asia and America in one” and, at the same time, “a great portico of Central Asia”. Describing the changes in the city in the previous twenty years, Halle paid special attention to Ali Bairamov Club that she visited: “In one of these palaces is the famous Women’s Club of Baku, with three thousand student members among the Turks and other Mohammedan women”. She continued however, by almost repeating a common place Orientalist description typical for the Soviet publications: “in few years ago they might not uncover their faces, not leave the house without their husbands’ leave, nor be in any sense human” (Halle 1938, 282). Later she comes back to the important - for the Western reader - issue of rights: As in the

example of the Soviet publications, women of Azerbaijan are presented by Halle as slaves or just "poor creatures". For example, women told her how they were sold when they were about 10 or 12 and in order to become only the 3d or 4th "pleasure" for their husbands. "It was shocking to hear what these poor creatures had formerly to suffer, in body and soul, and deeply moving to learn how, after the revolution, that a stroke more or less from all their humiliation and torments" (Halle 1938, 288).

Further on, Halle persistently comes back to the topic of seclusion. For example, while describing her visit to a small village near Baku, she focuses on women hidden behind the walls: "The dwelling houses of the native population strike one as like many of the women; they too are for the most part covered, they are hidden behind high, blank walls without windows, and from the outside you never really know what they look like" (Halle 1938, 285).

Furthermore, Halle uses orientalist generalizations implying that women's world is very narrow and that they are prisoners of their men: "'The world is the man's home and the home is the woman's world', used to be said all over the wide Islamic East" (Halle 1938, 285). Through this rhetoric Halle was not only homogenizing the "Islamic East" in its shared lack of freedom for women but also implied that women in Russia and in the "West" were treated much better. It also made Russia look as a part of the "West", to be seen as modern.

While discussing the changes Halle focuses particularly on the story of Leila Makhmedbekova, the first female pilot in Azerbaijan. She is described as veiling in the past, but "giving up her domestic work, going to school and exchanging her *chadra* for an airwoman's helmet" (Halle 1938, 290-1). This story had to confirm a seriousness of Soviet engagement with modernity and to map the important steps on the way to emancipation. Similarly to the Soviet pamphlets, Halle's presentation fully ignores to mention the ideas and activism that were developed by Azerbaijani women and men before the arrival of the Soviet "emancipators".

To sum up this part, it is important to say that Fannina Halle`s book on the emancipation of the "woman of the East" became

quite popular and was rather uncritically referred to by the researchers in the “West” as a scientific description of the Soviet emancipation for several decades.

Conclusion

Based on the analyzed textual and visual material dealing with the women`s situation in the Caucasus and in Azerbaijan in particular, it is possible to claim a consistent preservation of orientalist clichés and tropes. In spite of the presence of some anti-colonial rhetoric in the series of the pamphlets, they often presented “women of the East” as totally dependent from men and dominated by religious laws. It made them into obvious objects in need of help from outside, in the case of Azerbaijan – from the Bolshevik (Russian) center. Indeed, according to Said, because of Orientalism, “the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (Said 1996, 3).

Furthermore, the presentation of women in Azerbaijan as “dominated, “slaves” and “shadows” helped constructing the Russians as a whole and the Russian women in particular, as freer and more modern. According to Said, “identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against “those’ non-Europeans” (1996, 7) is an important mechanism for producing the “west”.

Finally, the analyzed materials suggest that the narrative on the “backward woman” in the Caucasus was important not only for convincing the Soviet people in the important emancipatory mission of the Soviet state, but also for improving the state’s image in the “West” and the “East”. Indeed, the Soviet emancipators were described in the publications of the “Soviet friends” as those fighting against colonialism and, at the same time, carrying out the civilizing mission similar to that of the “Western” countries.

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