Hijab in a Changing Tajik Society

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Shahnoza Nozimova
PhD Candidate at the School of Policy, Government,and International Affairs,
George Mason University
snozimov@masonlive.gmu.edu

Abstract

This article investigates Islamic veiling (*hijab*), an issue that has occupied center stage in the public debate in Tajikistan. State officials and institutions view it as alien (*begona*), while proponents argue it is a religious obligation (*farz*) to be fulfilled by every pious woman, especially outside of her domestic settings. I detail the limitations and functionalities that *hijab* offers for women in contemporary Tajikistan. In particular, as women experience increased pressure to seek employment outside of the home, there appears to be a need to construct new, socially acceptable, mechanisms to manifest conformity to patriarchy and to protect female purity (*iffat*) and honor (*nomus*): *hijab* and (pious) Islamic identity can potentially offer both. This study is based upon analysis of the existing literature on veiling in diverse contexts and the author's field research in Tajikistan.

Keywords

Tajikistan – women – Islam – gender and religion – Islamic veil – hijab – gender and state – satr – hijob – religion and state

All major religions offer normative prescriptions regarding the body, such as sexuality, hygiene, dress code, and dietary restrictions. Similarly, the political project of modern nation-states has evolved around the conception that the

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body of the citizenry is the source and subject of political authority.2 Thus, in the contemporary era, the human body serves as a canvas to demarcate the boundaries of the multi-layered identities, power and limitations of the dominant discourses, as well as the desire to be uniquely *oneself*. In this view, the contestation over dress is an inherent and critical component of the political process. Indeed, as pointed out by Fandy, "Political science without clothes" presents an incomplete picture of contestation, where the political power is:

> focused on the manifest, naked, and concentrated formal power of the state and other formal institutions … at the expense of the diffuse, fragmented, and localized disciplinary power and technologies of resistance – the informal politics and economy in which most people function.3

In contemporary Tajik society, female dress is often viewed through such a symbolic prism and used as a roadmap to navigate competing identities and systems of hegemony. Thus, different observers regard certain items and combinations of clothing as embodying the ideas (and ideologies) they seek or avoid.

In official discourse, where combatting alien influences has been identified as the utmost goal, the modern Islamic headscarf has become the nemesis of Tajik statehood.4 Moreover, other specific characteristics of female Islamic practice in Tajikistan, such as the activities of female religious specialists, are receiving greater scrutiny and criticism.5 Thus, distinct features of female

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2 Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9–10.

3 Mamoun Fandy, "Political Science Without Clothes: The Politics of Dress or Contesting the Spatiality of the State in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 20, no. 2 (1998): 88.

4 According to Eshoni Saidjon, *imomkhatib* of the central mosque of Khatlon and deputy chair- man of the Council of *Ulamo*, the Islamic *satr* that is worn by women nowadays "is not a Tajik item (*moli tojikon nest*) and is taken from the culture of the other nations, especially Arab, so wearing of it does not correspond to the Tajik women's shame/dignity (*sharmu hayo*)." More- over, according to Eshoni Saidjon, veiling that covers the face also does not correspond to Tajik state politics (*siyosati davlatdori*). See Ganjinai Ganj, "Mulloho guftand, ki zanho digar libosi tang napushand" [Mullahs said that women should not wear tight clothes], *Radioi Ozodi*, July 29, 2014, http://www.ozodi.org/content/tajik-national-dress-propaganda-in -tajikistan-mosque/25473550.html.

5 Abdujabbor Rahmonzoda, assistant to the president for social development and public rela- tions and a former minister of education, insists that the activities of the female religious specialists should be stopped (*khotima guzorem*) on the grounds that leaders (*rohbaron va*

habitus that normally were characterized as belonging to private religious domain and practice, have become a policy and security matter. This phenomenon is unprecedented (certainly, in post-Soviet history), yet unsurprising given, the increasing scale of state activism in the religious field.6

This article looks at three aspects of the *hijab* controversy in Tajikistan. First, I trace the politicization of female Islamic attire in contemporary Tajikistan and outline the official discourse (often supported by experts and observers) that views *hijab* as a token of new forms of religious practice and identity. I also present some general theoretical approaches in the literature on female religious dress. Second, I present a small selection of stories, including those of the women who have adopted *hijab* and one woman who did not. Finally, I propose an alternative perspective on *hijab* – a socially acceptable mechanism that reinstates male domination and, by so doing, also reestablishes the individual woman and her family's social status – thus becoming a practice that is often (re)produced and valued by women themselves.

Hijab as Controversy

The *hijab*, a female dress style that is also a powerful and instantly recognizable symbol of Islam, remains a hotly contested issue in Tajikistan. *Hijab* is a new phenomenon in Tajikistan and began to be worn in the early 2000s. Often viewed as an expression and measure of a new practice of Islam – different from the traditional practice7 – *hijab* quickly became a symbol of new forms of

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mas'ulon) of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are propagating their ideology through these bibiotuns. See Shahloi Gulkhoja and Umedi Nazar, "Bibiotunho" ba guruhi "risk" shomil meshavand" [Bibiotuns are part of the risk group], *Radioi Ozodi*, September 29, 2015, http://www.ozodi.org/content/religious-women-prohibited-attending-ceremonies/ 27277518.html. Meanwhile, in the northern city of Khujand, a public council of bibiotuns was established in 2011 and is reportedly actively involved in promoting state policies and regulations. "Bibiotun ne ekstremisty, bibiotun - arkhitektory dushi" [Bibiotun are not extremist, bibiotun - architects of soul], *Asia-Plus*, October 7, 2015, http://news.tj/ru/news/ bibiotun-ne-ekstremisty-bibiotun-arkhitektory-dushi.

6 Hakim Zainiddinov, "The Changing Relationship of the Secularized State to Religion in Tajikistan," *Journal of Church and State*, 55, no. 3 (2013): 456–477.

7 For example, Thibault uses the term "born-again" to describe the stricter religious life- style and dress styles that some of her interlocutors in Sughd region have adopted. See Helene Thibault, "Religious Revival in Tajikistan: The Soviet Legacy Revisited" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2014), https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/31787/1/Thibault _Helene_2014_These.pdf.

piety and more devout commitment to Islamic modesty and Qur'anic gender roles.

In this article, the term *hijab* (Taj: *hijob*, *satr, satri Islomi*) is used in the way the word is used and understood in the context of Tajikistan – a headscarf that conceals a woman's hair and neck (often her chin, too). In part, the peculiarity of the Tajik *hijab* debate lies in the fact that *hijob* is understood to be meaningfully different from *ruymol* (*qascha*, *kosynka*) – a ubiquitous headscarf/ kerchief (smaller in size and tied at the nape of the neck, which usually covers only parts of the hair but leaves the neck and chin exposed) that is worn by women across Tajikistan. Certainly, this is a more "lay" understanding of the term, quite different from the traditional interpretation of *hijab*, which in the Qur'an "refers to a spatial curtain that divides or provides privacy"8 and not to any specific item of clothing.

The first problems with *hijab* in Tajikistan's public sphere began to surface in 2003 with reports that some academic institutions did not allow female students to attend classes while wearing an unusual headscarf.9 These and similar reports (e.g., passport officials refusing to issue documents to women pictured in *hijab*) initially were largely dismissed by the general public and politically active segments of the population. Even the leadership of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) (at the time still a legal political party and an active member of the country's political processes) did not take a firm position on the matter; the IRPT chairman "believe[d] that these cases of discrimination against believers are not state policy," rather actions taken "at the whim of the officials."10 Ever since then the controversy around the *hijab* has grown in scale and degree. In particular, the Ministry of Education has been at the forefront of the battle against "foreign garb," alien culture and ideology, and, ultimately, so-called non-Tajik Islam.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education banned *hijab* in secondary schools on the basis that it "is unacceptable in secular schools and violates the Constitution and the new law on education" and issued instructions barring children from going to mosques.11 Again, the response from IRPT leadership was half-hearted. While recognizing the issue as "flagrant infringement of Muslims' rights," its chairman nevertheless tried to avoid the debate, lamenting that the Council

8 Richard C. Martin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 721.

9 Igor Rotar, "Tajikistan: Religious Freedom Survey, November 2003," Forum 18, November20, 2003, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=190.

10 Ibid.

11 Igor Rotar, "Tajikistan: Mosque Visits and Hijabs Banned for Children," Forum 18, October 31, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=679.

of *Ulamo* (the state-controlled council of religious scholars12) did not even respond to this "disgraceful and arbitrary order."13 The IRPT and its chairman's position on this matter is important to mention, because, as reported in 2006, all of the female members of the party (about 15,000 women at the time) wore *hijab*.14

Yet, the challenges faced by female students wearing *hijab* were never properly addressed or remedied – for example, *hijab*-wearing girls faced unnecessary hurdles to receiving school certificates.15 In 2007, Davlatmoh Ismoilova, a third-year university student, initiated a legal battle to secure her right to wear *hijab* at the Institute of Languages. Yet, her case against the Ministry of Education was thrown out of court and she lost the suit against the school; as a result, she did not return to finish her degree.16

The president of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, has consistently maintained the need to fight foreign influences and since 2000 has used the combination of *farhang* and *begona* ("culture" and "other/foreign") in at least 60 distinct speeches. Specific references to clothing and recommendations to express pride in national dresses started appearing in the president's speeches in 2009.17

In 2015, the fight against *hijab* reached new heights, with high-level government officials (from Rahmon to regional governors and city mayors) stepping up the rhetoric against *hijab*, calling it a cradle for fomenting foreign religious extremism (Taj: *ifrotgaroi*18) and a threat to country's peace (*sulh*) and unity (*vahdat*). Both terms, *sulh* and *vahdat* (sometimes: *sulhu subot* – peace and stability), refer to the specific political order that has emerged in the post-Civil

12 Tim Epkenhans, "Regulating Religion in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Some Remarks on Religious Association Law and 'Official' Islamic Institutions in Tajikistan," *Security and Human Rights*, 20, no. 1 (2009): 94–99.

13 Kabiri quoted in Rotar, "Tajikistan: Mosque Visits and Hijabs Banned for Children."

14 Ramziya Mirzobekova, "Khidzhab dlya tadzhichki: moda ili dan' vere?" *Asia-Plus,* November 12, 2006, http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1165788180.

15 Igor Rotar, "Tajikistan: New Moves against Muslims in North," Forum 18, March 7, 2006, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=739.

16 "Hijab-Wearing Students Dismissed From Tajik University," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 26, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/HijabWearing_Students_Dismissed_From_Tajik_University/1739828.html; Farangis Najibullah, "Tajikistan: Court Rejects Student Challenge Of Head-Scarf Ban," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 12, 2007, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1077592.html.

17 Press service of President of Republic of Tajikistan, http://president.tj/, 2005, 2015.

18 "Qarori Ubaydulloev alayhi 'ifrotgaroi'-i zanon" [Ubaydulloev's decree against female extremism], *Ozodagon*, March 16, 2015, http://www.ozodagon.com/20691-arori-ubaydulloev-alayi-ifrotgaro-i-zanon.html.

War Tajikistan. The following quote from President Rahmon's "Lesson of Peace" speech (delivered on September 1, 2015, in Kulob) conveys the message directly:

> In particular, I want to warn that externalism (*zohirparasti)*, worship of the foreign (*begonaparasti*), and superstition (*khurofot*) will bring a horrifying end (*oqibati dahshatnok*) to the society and statehood of the ancient Tajik nation, as these phenomena threaten the country's security and stability, prevent its development, and cause misfortune.19

Moving beyond the specific episodes and narratives of politicization, the major point is that in Tajikistan the debate over *hijab* revolves around the perspective that it is a symbol of a qualitatively different interpretation and practice of Islam. A similar view emerges from scholars – e.g., Thibault presents *hijab* as an attribute of the "born-again"20 Muslims in northern Tajikistan. Miles views "an increase in the number of women and girls enacting the Islamic principle of wearing hijab" as an "aspect of Islamic revival in Tajikistan."21 Among observers and the policy community, this form of Islam was often viewed as political and contentious to the extent that images of women wearing *hijab* were displayed and viewed as evidence of growing religious radicalism in the Central Asian region.22 For example, Salhani hopes that Kazakhstan will serve as a moderate path to be emulated by other Muslim states, precisely because it embodies "Islam without a veil" – "the kinder, gentler, and more humane face of Islam."23

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19 Emomali Rahmon, "Sukhanroni bakhshida ba Ruzi donish va 70-solagii ta'sisi Donish- gohi davlatii Kulob ba nomi Abuaddullohi Rudaki" [Speech dedicated to Knowledge Day and 70-year anniversary of Kulob State University named after Abduabdullohi Rudaki], September 1, 2015, Kulob, Tajikistan, http://president.tj/node/9731.

20 In Thibault's work, the term "born again" refers to "believers who lived a secular life before 'discovering' faith and adopting a lifestyle based on religious principles." In particular, in Thibault's account men contrasted their newly acquired piety "to their previous 'sinner's lifestyle' defined as: "drinking, smoking, and fooling around with women (*ya pil, kuril i gulyal*)." And importantly, for women, the term denotes "the fact that they did not know God and therefore were neither praying nor wearing hijab." See Thibault, "Religious Revival in Tajikistan," 139–140.

21 Marintha Miles, "Switching to Satr: An Ethnography of the Particular in Women's Choices in Head Coverings in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Affairs*, 2, no. 4 (2015): 368.

22 For example, consider the image on the cover of the book edited by Yemelianova. See Galina Yemelianova (ed.), Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union (London: Routledge, 2010).

23 Claude Salhani, *Islam Without a Veil: Kazakhstan's Path of Moderation* (Washington, dc: Potomac Books, 2011), 166.

In comparative perspective, it is crucially important to note that the debate over female Islamic dress is not happening in a vacuum and is not, by any measure, a development unique to Tajikistan or other predominantly Muslim post-communist states and territories.24 Over the past 15 years, *hijab* has become a major point of legislative and political contention in contexts where Muslims live as minority groups (namely, Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia).25 Female Islamic dress produced an even longer his- tory of controversial debate in other Muslim majority contexts (e.g., in Middle East and South Asia).26 Moreover, while strong connotations persist, such "veiling" debates are not exclusive to Islam and Muslim communities: in 2010 an Israeli rabbinical court, prompted by the husbands of Jewish women who had decided to wear the Jewish *burqa*, declared *burqa* a "sexual fetish" on the basis that covering "too much" (i.e., "exaggerating") could be considered equally as "promiscuous" as covering "too little."27 The legal context for these debates is especially murky in the former cases, as there are clear references to secularism, freedom of conscience, and human rights in their respective supreme legal codes.

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24 Human Rights Watch, "You Dress According to Their Rules," New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/03/10/you-dress-according-their-rules/ enforcement-islamic-dress-code-women-chechnya (accessed December 7, 2015); Michele E. Commercio, "The Politics and Economics of 'Retraditionalization' in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31, no. 6 (2015): 529–556.

25 Europe: Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer (eds), *Politics, Religion, and Gender: Framing and Regulating the Veil* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Anastasia Vakulenko, *Islamic Veiling in Legal Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (English ed). (New York: Berg, 2010); Bronwyn Winter, *Hijab and the Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Canada: Sajida S. Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough, *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (Toronto, on: Women's Press, 2003). us: Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

26 Turkey: Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (rev. ed.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Richard Peres, *The Day Turkey Stood Still: Merve Kavak- ci's Walk into the Turkish Parliament* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 2012). For Egypt, see Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*.

27 Adrian Blomfield, "Israeli Rabbis Clamp down on Burka," *Telegraph*, July 30, 2010, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/7919501/Israeli-rabbis-clamp-down-on-burka.html.

Literature on Religious Dress

The literature on religious dress is vast. Numerous scholars from distinct disciplines have studied the subject. The following literature review presents some of the perspectives that have emerged through a diverse research agenda, studying religious dress of different confessions, as well as in diverse geographic contexts. In this section, I discuss three distinct approaches that have been crucial in developing explanations for the *hijab* phenomenon in contemporary Tajikistan, which I present in the subsequent sections.

Social Control Approach

From a sociological perspective, dress is a social artifact that contains and reproduces elements and cues of non-verbal communication expressing an individual's disposition to the immediately surrounding social order. Building on theories of leading sociologists, e.g., Douglas, Goffman, Foucault, Bourdieu, and others, Arthur argues that dress "provides a window" through which one can examine the power and limits of social control systems.28 Her edited collection, *Religion, Dress, and the Body*, engages the social control approach in a variety of conservative religious contexts (Mennonite, Mormon, Amish, Catholic nuns, Afghan Muslims, and Hasidic Jews) in the United States and demonstrates that, for the most part, religious dress is the individual's internalized (yet, outward) manifestation of the particular group's religious doc- trine and social hierarchies that reproduce patriarchal domination. Since all of the works in the volume are based on qualitative methods and ethnographic fieldwork, authors provide a wealth of insights on the causal mechanisms of social control. For example, Graybill and Arthur, analyzing women's dress in the Mennonite communities, list personal (self-regulation, self-censorship), informal (peer pressure, gossip), and formal (sanctions of the religious specialists) means of control to ensure conformity and inhibition of deviance.29

In Tajikistan, Harris reports similar mechanisms of social control of female dress, body, and overall (sexual) behavior.30 However, an important qualification needs to be introduced: in *Religion, Dress, and the Body* the individual women are seen as both the subjects and objects of communal control. In Harris' account in Tajikistan it is the men who are the subjects of social

28 Linda B. Arthur, ed., *Religion, Dress, and the Body* (New York: Berg, 1999), 1.

29 Arthur, *Religion, Dress, and the Body*, 10.

30 Colette Harris, Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan (Sterling, va: Pluto Press, 2004).

control, and while women's behavior is still the object of control, male honor (Taj: *nomus*) is dependent on "control over women and younger family members, and virility."31 Consequently, how well women in the family perform their gender-assigned roles and duties, measured by conforming to the norms pertaining to submission, virginity, chastity, and fertility, adds up to the social perception of the male, head-of-household's, and subsequently family's, honor.32

Personal Security Approach

Another set of literature has emerged from the ethnographic studies carried out in the Middle East and, more recently, in the Europe and North America among Muslim immigrant communities, and focuses on *hijab* and Islamic dress. Leila Ahmed's aptly (and somewhat presciently) titled book, *A Quiet Revolution*, explores the phenomenon the (re)emergence of veiling in Egypt and United States.

Ahmed begins her (often personal) account of the dramatic story of the veil, which is ultimately located in the political context, by tracing the intellectual and institutional origins of the movement for unveiling in Egypt in the early twentieth century.33 In this account, sartorial transformations were contemporaneous to the changes in people's lifestyles (e.g., preference for Western furniture), architectural remake of the cities, etc. – processes that were perceived to be a prerequisite and, ultimately, measures of societal advancement.34 By the mid-twentieth century, Ahmed maintains unveiling became a norm of life, not only for urban middle – and upper – class, but even in the more conservative rural areas.35 A few decades later, however, women began to don headscarves again, and this time it was not the headscarves that their mothers and grand- mothers wore before unveiling but the "Muslim Brotherhood" veil – *hijab*.

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31 More on Tajik conception of *nomus*, see Sophie Roche, *Domesticating Youth: Youth Bulges and Its Socio-Political Implications in Tajikistan* (New York: Berghahn, 2014); also White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, for ethno-gendered reading of honor in the Turkish context.

32 In Harris's own account "what counts is *image.*" See Harris, *Control and Subversion*, 20.

33 For similar issues in other Muslim contexts, see Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam, and the State* (Philadelphia, pa: Temple University Press, 1991) and Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

34 Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, 27–31.

35 Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, 20, 43.

The transformation of the Central Asian social landscape in the first half of the twentiethcenturywasnolessdramatic.36 Similarly, unveiling was seenascentral to the conception of (Soviet) modernity. Yet, while there are certainly a number of parallels that we can draw upon between the Tajik and Egyptian (or Turkish) experiences of unveiling, it is important also to keep in mind the differences. In some sense, Soviet Tajikistan never fully unveiled. Yes, the *faranji* (*burqa*-style attire) was no longer worn, but women did not fully transform into a bareheaded, Euro- pean-style proletariat either. National dress and different kerchiefs and headscarveswerethenewalternatives.37 And women remained not too keen on joining the workforce–womencomposed39percentof the total labor market, well below the all-Soviet average of 51 percent.38 Similarly, Harris argues that woman's public submission to the male guardian was a transformed practice of seclusion.39

Ahmed's account of the reemergence of *hijab* in Egypt is based on her reading of various ethnographic studies carried out in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and later.40 In the early years, some of the common threads that came up in various women's accounts for donning the veil were personal – responses and solutions to the problems that they were facing in everyday lives.41 The women

36 Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Douglas T. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Politics of Gender and the Soviet Paradox: Neither Colonized, Nor Modern?" *Central Asian Survey*, 26, no. 4 (2007): 601–623.

37 Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Between Lenin and Allah: Women and Ideology in Tajikistan," in Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (eds), *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity* (Boulder, co: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 163–186.

38 Zukhra Madaminzhanova and Ildar Mukhtarov, "Cultural Life in the Ferghana Valley Un- der Khrushchev and Brezhnev," in S. Frederick Starr et al. (eds), *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), 166.

39 See Harris, Control and Subversion, 58.

40 Fadwa El Guindi, "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," *Social Problems*, 28, no. 4 (1981): 465–485; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Arlene Elowe MacLeod, "Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo," *Signs*, 17, no. 3 (1992): 533–557; Ghada Hashem Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); John A. Williams, "Return to the Veil in Egypt," *Middle East Review*, 11, no. 3 (1979): 49–54; Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

41 Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, 88–89, 123.

are portrayed displaying strong agency in choosing to dress in Islamic styles. In fact, in some scholarly accounts, the phenomenon of *les femmes religieuses* is understood as a women's movement to reclaim – not withdraw from – the public sphere.42

Among the accounts of "personal reasons" for veiling, there are some that clearly echo the earlier-presented analytical lens on social control, where women (in Egypt in 1970s and 1980s) reported that it was a religious/pious thing to do, or as mothers and Egyptian women they needed to dress accordingly.43 For others, it was a concession to their male family members that would allow them to work, study, and more in public.44 However, while the critique of the social control hypothesis may be the apparent lack of female agency, in the personal accounts the decision to wear a veil is not viewed as utter submission to religion and societal norms of patriarchy; rather, it is a negotiated and conscious choice.

In such accounts the Islamic veil is liberating: by imbuing "women with a kind of moral and religious authority" the Islamic dress styles discouraged harassment in public transportation or places where women studied, worked, and lived.45 It was argued in the 1980s that *hijab* allowed Egyptian women to work and "go about their lives" while "affirm[ing] community belonging and respect for community values;" moreover, for the male family members it was a sufficient symbol of the women's "commitment to their families and their roles as wives and mothers."46

Strategic Marriage (Economic) Approach

In the recent years the phenomenon of women adopting conservative elements of dress and lifestyle, in a socio-political environment where such behavior does not seem to be sanctioned and/or enforced, has puzzled many scholars. Such behavior is seen as contradicting the commonly accepted (i.e., Western, liberal) narratives of female emancipation,47 subsequently deemed as suboptimal action that goes against the women's interests as a group. Thus, unsurprisingly, there has been a considerable effort on behalf of behavioral social scientists to explain this apparent paradox and to rationalize women's individual choices that seemed to contradict their group interests.

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42 Ibid., 87, 125.

43 Ibid., 88–90.

44 Ibid., 119–130.

45 Ibid., 87.

46 Ibid., 122.

47 Svetlana Peshkova, "A Post-Soviet Subject in Uzbekistan: Islam, Rights, Gender, and Other Desires," *Women's Studies*, 42, no. 6 (2013), 667–695.

In one such study, Blaydes and Linzer explore female support for what they identify as "Islamic fundamentalism," operationalized, among other variables, as wearing of Islamic headscarves.48 The authors offer an interesting theory, arguing: "Financial insecurity is a key determinant of the propensity to adopt fundamentalist beliefs and preferences."49 Moreover, under the conditions where insecurities persist in terms of succeeding in a job market, women may find marriage as an alternative route to economic stability.50 Thus, to increase chances of a favorable marriage, women need to find ways to improve their positions in the marriage market and adopting "fundamentalist values" (i.e., conservative dress) might be a decision that is in their best individual eco- nomic interests, even if that might go against the interests that women have as a group.

In the course of analysis of the data gathered through fieldwork,51 (which consisted of interviews and participant observation) in Dushanbe and Khujand, I found that while all three approaches were helpful in explaining the dynamics that govern the lives of my interlocutors, there was also a need to contextualize and refine some of the assumptions. In the following section, I present vignettes of women who wear and do not wear *hijab*, followed by a more nuanced perspective that proposes adopting a contextualized view on *hijab*.

Hijab as Peace

My conversations with several women who wear *hijob/satr*, both in Dushanbe and Khujand, revealed that they view their attire as fulfilling, not contradicting, both religious and national norms and codes of dress and behavior. Although most talked about initial discomfort associated with the first adoption, it was attributed to the necessary learning curve of placing each needle pin correctly

48 Lisa Blaydes and Drew A. Linzer, "The Political Economy of Women's Support for Fundamentalist Islam," *World Politics*, 60, no. 4 (2008): 580.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 My most recent fieldwork in Tajikistan took place in early fall of 2015. Dushanbe and Khujand were chosen as field sites because we can observe a variety of styles of dress and head coverings among women in these urban centers and often women dressed in different styles live in one family/house. Interviews were for the most part conducted in Tajik, although on frequent occasions respondents did use Russian words and phrases. All of the names of the respondents have been changed and I am omitting specific references to residences to protect the identities of my interview subjects.

for secure fit of the scarf and overcoming the feeling of unprecedented visibility.

> I was entering Bunafsha's house [*havli* - compound], expecting to see her in some beautiful head covering that I was told she usually wears. In- stead, she appeared in her loose, *hijabi*-style dress (with large abstract color patterns of fuchsia pink and black) with long sleeves and black leggings peeking out from under the dress as she walked. Her head was bare and there were two, big patches of baldness on her head. She wasn't always bald, she rushed to tell me as soon as she offered me a seat at her kitchen table. In fact, she used to have a floor-length, bright auburn braid, thick as a trunk of a young tree (she has cut off the braid many years ago and now keeps her hair at shoulder-length). To my question, then what's happened, she had a straightforward answer – she's been wearing hijab for too long. Hair loss is common for hijab-wearing women [*hijobu satrpushon*], "don't you know?" I was asked. "No" I replied.52

Indeed, our general (scholarly, too) attempt to put *hijabi* women into some nicely fitting categorical box, which would "rationalize" and explain their choice of practicing some degree of gender seclusion, or the tendency to view them as indicators of some worrisome social (and political) developments, all have left us fixated on the headscarf, often uninterested in getting to know the "head" of the person (woman) underneath it.

The middle-aged women (aged between 35 and 45) that I talked to in Dushanbe and Khujand would insist that it wasn't changes in faith, degrees of religiousness, or practice of religion that has led them to adopt *hijab*. Most of them insisted that they were quite religious, devout and practicing Muslims, long before changing their sartorial styles. Instead, each would recall a family scandal preceding the adoption of the new headscarf, saying that they had to do it to prevent their marriages and families from falling apart (often "in the name of children").

For Bunafsha (39 years old) and Nargis (38 years old), the scandals involved their new occupations. They both entered the shuttle-trade business, which required travel outside of Tajikistan and considerable working hours outside of home. Bunafsha's adoption of *satr* was very dramatic – she had to put on *hijab* a few hours before her third trip to Bishkek. She said, while she wasn't opposed to the idea of *hijab*, she just wished she was given some time to learn to "manage" (*uhda kardan*) it.

52 Author's field notes.

Nargis, on the other hand, was completely opposed to *hijab*. She says she is "modern" and the idea of *hijab* did not register with her at all. Nargis has a degree in journalism and had a short-lived tv career that ultimately ended at her husband's insistence. Soon after she started her shuttle-trade business, her husband began arguing with her anew, saying that an honorable (*poryadoch- naya*) woman must first of all think about the honor and status of her husband (*chest' i dostoinstvo muzha*) and that her unchaperoned trips to Turkey and China were casting a shadow on his manhood and family's honor (*chest' sem'i*). In response to these scandals, she took the kids and left her marital home. Nargis stayed at her parents' house for 10 days with her three children (one with a severe disability) and decided that she cannot care for them on her own, so she agreed to put on *hijab* and returned home. Nargis laughed off the recollection of this traumatic episode by mentioning that *hijab* came with a good "bonus" – a lump sum of $1,000 from her husband. "At least I made him pay for it" – she said.

It has been four years for Nargis and three years for Bunafsha since they adopted *hijab*, and both say that now they cannot imagine (*tasavvur*) them- selves without it, even though both mention severe hair loss and recent harassment from the government officials at their workplaces (mostly tax- officers and police that have been frequenting their stores since the most recent anti-*hijab* campaign took off in the spring of 2015).

It has been a year since Sadbarg (age 42) put on *hijab*, but she says she still cannot get used to it or start liking it. Swiping through the images on her smart- phone that bear evidence of how "contemporary" (*sovremennaya*) she used to be in her over-the-knee length denim skirt and short-sleeve tops, Sadbarg says that her late mother-in-law for many years tried to talk her into (*ugovo- rit'*) dressing more conservatively (*bama'nitar*). About a year ago, Sadbarg's mother-in-law began insinuating that she had been unfaithful to her husband with a man at her workplace. Sadbarg insisted all of it was fabricated, made up (*vydumanno*) by her mother-in-law. After numerous rumors and insults, divorce seemed imminent for Sadbarg (in fact, it was actively pushed by her mother-in-law). Yet, fearing for her future and dreading the reputation associated with a divorced woman accused of adultery and the shadow it would cast on the marriage prospects of her teenage daughters, she had to quit her well- paying job and put on *hijab* to regain her husband's trust.

All three women said that they do not plan on taking off the *hijab*. They say in our society taking off *hijab* is viewed very negatively. Moreover, Bunafsha says it is a "big sin" (*gunohi buzurg*) in front of God to put on *hijab* – to uphold God's order (*farzi khudoro ijro kardan*) – and then to take it off – as if not rec- ognizing the authority of God's words (*gapi khudoro nabardoshtan*). Also, all

three dread the prospects of their family scandals resuming anew. *Hamin mo tinj gardemu moro tinj guzoran, ba mo digar hej chiz darkor nest* (All we want is to be peaceful and be left at peace, nothing else) said Sadbarg, referring to recent government intrusions that were creating new difficulties in a lifestyle that she has learned to manage.

Hijab in Tajikistan in a New Perspective

I look at the phenomenon of *hijab* among women in contemporary Tajikistan through a new lens. I agree that *hijab* may be an attribute of the women who have found (or adopted) new piety (or new ways of expressing religiosity) and began living and practicing a qualitatively different interpretation of Islam. Yet, nevertheless, we should recognize that not all the women who have ad- opted *hijab* are necessarily doing so because of changes in their religiosity or religious practice. In fact, based on my encounters, most women who wear *hijab* do not view themselves as "born-againers" – even before wearing *hijab* they have performed Islamic religious obligations and did not consider their past selves any less Muslim or pious. For the women whose vignettes I presented, *hijab* serves a specific function – to mediate the effects of the socially unacceptable situations, which they have encountered.

With Bunafsha and Nargis, many aspects of their new occupation are socially condemned and viewed as inappropriate for women. They engage in business activities that require considerable outside-of-the-home working hours, where their encounters with people are not gender secluded, unchaperoned foreign travels for many days, and considerable autonomy in financial decision-making: all of these actions challenge socially accepted male- dominated hierarchies. In a society where family honor (and manhood) depends on the man's ability to successfully control female sexuality and autonomy, it is in the woman's best interest to maintain and reestablish male dominance to ensure social status, reputation, and honor of the family and herself.53

Evidently, this was even truer in Sadbarg's situation, no matter how humiliating the conditions upon which a woman puts on *hijab*, she still in many ways acts in her own self-interest, often weighing the risks (for herself and family) of the alternative. Sadbarg says she was horrified by the thought that she could dishonor her old, sickly father and bring the shame of an adulterous divorced daughter upon his house and name. Moreover, she feared that her daughters' prospects for marriage would be irreparably tainted (she also has a younger

53 Harris, *Control and Subversion*.

son, but she never mentioned possible damage to his future). In fact, she said the only way she was able to persuade her husband not to proceed with the divorce was by urging him to think about the future of their daughters.

Thus, in situations where the male-dominated social order is challenged to the extent that other mechanisms to reestablish the system are no longer sufficient (for example, dressing in other non-*hijabi* yet conservative styles – Tajik national dress) there is a need to construct new, socially acceptable mechanisms to manifest and protect female purity (*iffat*) and honor (*nomus*): *hijob/ satr* and (pious) Islamic identity, which *hijab* relates, can possibly offer both.

An important issue that needs to be addressed here is that while the imperatives of wearing *hijab* are certainly part of the patriarchal system that by definition provides greater advantages to men, it would be erroneous to conclude that women have accepted *hijab* from a position of weakness. Instead, often we find women are exactly the ones who mastermind the change to hijab and often men merely serve as mediums to "voice" the need for a new norm of dress. Thus, even if it might appear that women are submitting to a patriarchal social order, framed in the language of religious or national codes of normative behavior, we should nevertheless allow for the possibility that women also use those codes to further their interests.

> Bunafsha left the house to go to the store [where she worked] soon after her mother-in-law, Sanavbar-khola, returned home from a private physiotherapy session. Sanavbar-khola is in her early 70s and only occasionally puts on an elegant scarf that shows her immaculately black-dyed hair gathered in a neat updo. Since she did not wear *hijab*, I wanted to know how she reacted to her daughter-in-law's *satr*. She said it pleased her, in fact, she insisted that she was the one initiating the change (not her son, as Bunafsha told me). Sanavbar-khola said she goes to various community and family gatherings (*ma'rakahoi mahalla/kheshu tabor*) and has heard scandalous gossip (*gaphoi bema'ni*) about women who engage in the shuttle trade (*biznes*). She said she feared for her son's (and family's) honor and reputation in the community. But ultimately, Sanavbar-khola said, it was the fact that Bunafsha and her son had two teenage daughters (*dukhtarhoi khona*), who needed to be married off soon after they graduate from secondary school, which convinced her to push for her daughter-in-law's adoption of *hijob*. Sanavbar-khola claimed that a woman wearing *hijob* (*zani bahijob*) is considered well-behaved and honorable (*baodob, bamai'ni, baoru banomus*),54 and gossips that tarnish name and

54 Stephan similarly observes that hijabs "[a]part from their function as a religious statement … are an unmistakable attribute of female morality and as such place the sexual

> reputation (*nomu obru merezonad*) do not spread so easily, so everybody wants to marry her daughters.55

In Bunafsha's own perception, too, until recently the only major downside to her *hijab* was the hair loss (government pressures to stop wearing and selling Islamic style clothes became a "new" problem). Otherwise, she insists her complete comfort with the garb and the sense of newfound freedom it provides. Bunafsha married into a relative's family in her late teens and although she was allowed to continue her education (on part-time, *zaochno* basis) and eventually received a diploma in banking and finance, she had not had any formal or informal employment for close to 15 years since she graduated.

> You know, I was supposed to begin a prestigious internship (*praktika*) at a bank. I had begged, cried, left to my parents' house, all to no avail – I was not allowed to work. The only times I would get out of the house [shared with in-laws] was when I visited my parents every two weeks or we'd go to some family event (*ma'raka*). My husband has a successful business, so I did get most of the things that I asked for: food, clothes, jewelry. … But when I started doing "biznes" I felt so independent, I started earning my own money, I did not have to ask my husband for money and report in every detail how and why I spent it.

So, when it came down to the choice, "You either put on a *hijab* or stop working," Bunafsha's decision, in her own mind, was easily understood and justifiable. Although, she said, her father – an "old-school" man with a government career in Soviet and post-Soviet times – still cannot come to terms with her being "all-wrapped-up" (*pechondagi*). Besides *hijab*, Bunafsha says there is very little change in the style of her clothing: "I can still wear my European-style skirt suits," provided she puts on a fine-knit top with a mock turtleneck underneath. Also, the seamstresses have come up with new designs that combine Tajik traditional dress with the elements required for *hijabi* dress (long sleeves and closed upper chest), which allows Bunafsha to dress in the new fashion- able fabrics each season.

My exchanges with women who did not wear *hijab* also seemed to support the view that *hijab* has to be understood contextually. For example, my lengthy conversation with 38-year-old Lola about *hijab*, its doctrinal basis, and her

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reputation (*obru, sharmu hayo*) of the wearer at the center of public attention." See Manja Stephan, "Education, Youth, and Islam: The Growing Popularity of Private Religious Lessons in Dushanbe, Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey*, 29, no. 4 (2010): 478.

55 Author's field notes, 2015.

opposition to this form of dressing was very revealing. Lola has some "expensive" (Turkish-made) skirt suits but mostly wears traditional Tajik dresses, which in 2015 summer season were tailored as form-fitting with a narrow and tight bodice, higher hemline than traditionally (but still well over the knee), with side slits and slim trouser pants made of matching fabric.

> To my question of how was she feeling today, Lola said "Oh, I am so tired," she sounded somewhat irritated. Yet, she said she did not mind talking to me. So, I asked her why she was feeling tired. Lola said, she spent the whole previous day waiting for the marriage negotiators (*khostgorho*), who have previously come to seek her daughter's hand in marriage (Yasmina, Lola's eldest daughter has recently turned 19 and started her second year in university). "Oh, so you wanted to agree to the proposal (*rozigi dodan*)?" – I asked. "No, quite the opposite, I wanted to say no, so that they don't keep coming" – Lola said and continued, "they are from *raion* [rural area], [their] living conditions are poor (*sharoit nest*), and more than anything, all of the women in the family wear *hijob*! (*hamai zanhoyashon hijobpush*!)" When I asked if that was one of the conditions (wearing *hijab*) that the marriage negotiators mentioned, she admitted that it was not the case. Yet, Lola maintained that such things are rarely discussed now; it has become part of a new norm (*qoidahoi nav*).56

Lola's stand on *hijab* turned out to be complex: about three years ago her husband has asked her to put on *satr*, she furiously refused and told him that he was in no position to dictate the way she should dress. She says her husband was somewhat disappointed and surprised: Lola, as a devout Muslim diligently performs her daily prayers (she started praying five times a day six years ago) and a few years back began taking private Arabic classes from a local university professor and became a disciple of her neighborhood *bibiotun* (female religious specialist). Thus, in her husband's mind, given her serious interest in religious practice and activities, his request to put on *hijab* did not constitute anything extraordinary. However, Lola was convinced that what is required of pious women ("and men!" – she added, making sure I noted it) according to teachings of Islam is modesty: "Nowhere is it mentioned how many centi- meters should your hemline or sleeves (*domanu ostin*) be." She viewed such sartorial norms as necessarily a product of history, culture, geography, climate, etc. Lola has a university degree in exact sciences and although she is "officially listed" as a part-time lab assistant in an educational institution, her main

56 Author's field notes, 2015.

source of income is tailoring and embroidery of traditional dresses. Lola says, part of her not wanting to put on *hijab* was related to her occupation, too – she saw a conflict in that by putting on *hijab* either she would be producing clothing items that were not Islamic enough or that she would be presenting herself as more pious than her clients. In Lola's words *hijab* could jeopardize the independence and self-realization that she was achieving through her home-basedwork:

> I love what I do! I get to meet and talk to many women, I get to share and participate in their most joyful experiences – weddings and special events (*tuyu ma'raka*), I deal with aesthetically beautiful fabrics, I always have my own money (*puli khudam* [not accountable to her husband or part of family budget]). Thus, I will not risk losing all of these aspects of my nice life for wearing a headscarf, which I am not fully convinced is needed by religion or appropriate in our society.57

The very factors that have pushed previously discussed women to adopt the Islamic headscarf were, in fact, working for the opposite outcome in Lola's case. It was particularly the nature of her occupation – being home-based and exclusively gender-secluded that has allowed Lola to refuse to put on the *hijab*. Evidently, her decision also reflects a great degree of autonomy, in that she has approached the issue from the perspective of measuring her individual benefits, fearing that an Islamic headscarf might push away her usual clientele (mostly young and mid-age women who order custom-tailored traditional Tajik dresses from ornate, expensive fabrics with elaborate embroidery and beading), Lola consciously chose to adopt an interpretation of "modest dress" that closely echoes state-sponsored discourse.

The new approach proposes to look at *hijab* contextually, by carefully examining the limitations and affordabilities it produces for each woman, who chooses to wear or not wear *hijab*. It is a refined amalgamation of the previously presented approaches in the literature on religious dress and *hijab*. It agrees with the social control approach in recognition that *hijab* in the con- text of Tajikistan reproduces a male-dominated social order; however, it adds a dimension that for some women the decision on *hijab* can still be a product of her autonomy and agency, no matter how limited under certain circumstances. The personal security approach is the most specific of the approaches presented. However, in the context of Tajikistan we still have to take into account the peculiarities of the activities in which the women might be engaged – if

57 Author's field notes, 2015.

those activities produce substantial female autonomy in non-gender secluded environments, then *hijab* appears to afford the utmost protection and support for "respected woman" status. And finally, the strategic marriage approach has to be modified to include that insecurities do not always have to be economic, there is also greater social value in marriage itself as a source of respectable social standing – *hijab* can be used as a tool to enter and preserve familial unions (no matter how economically viable they may be).

In many ways, this perspective of situating *hijab* in the context of a specific socio-economic order continues in the line of the recent research on Islam and women in Central Asia, for example, Stephan and Commercio.58 In particular, these studies suggest a relationship between economic uncertainty and an increase in manifest religious behavior, especially among young and urban women. Notably, based on a small survey of female students studying in Islamic and secular universities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Commercio presents evidence for increased support of "retraditionalization"59 among "young, urban, educated women" that should necessarily be placed "in the context of ongoing economic uncertainty." Stephan, in her study of private Islamic education and veiling in Dushanbe, also concludes that "in the context of market transition, impoverishment and limited career prospects, Islam offers an 'honourable' option for urban youth to increase their social status."60

In these studies, "retraditionalization," or the increase in female Islamic practice and attire, is perceived as an alternative to, or a step away from, the workforce. However, cursory observations do not support this perspective: if anything we have witnessed an exponential increase in women wearing *hijab* and working in private, non-governmental, and informal (e.g., bazaars) labor market sectors of Tajikistan. General labor force data also indicate a stable rate of female labor force participation, as well as a steady share of women in the national labor force (see Figure 1). Moreover, women are increasingly pursuing work options outside of Tajikistan: the share of women labor migrants practically doubled from 6.61 to 13.1 between 2007 and 2009.61 And recent

58 Stephan, "Education, Youth, and Islam"; Commercio, "The Politics and Economics of 'Retraditionalization' in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan."

59 The term is used to denote "a return to traditional values, family life, and religion, which entails, in part, women being moved out of work force." Kligman, cited in Commercio, "The Politics and Economics of 'Retraditionalization' in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 529–531.

60 Stephan, "Education, Youth, and Islam," 479.

61 Alexander M. Danzer and Oleksiy Ivaschenko, "Migration Patterns in a Remittances Dependent Economy: Evidence from Tajikistan during the Global Financial Crisis," *Migration Letters*, 7, no. 2 (2010): 190.

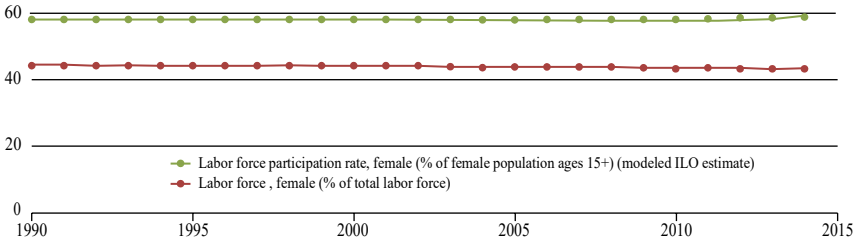

Figure 1 *Female labor force and participation rate in Tajikistan, 1990–2014*
Source: World Development Indicators, 2015, http://databank.worldbank .org/data/reports.aspx?source=2andcountry=TJKandseries=andperiod=.

statistics from the Migration Service of Tajikistan (2012) suggest that women still make up about 14 percent of the nearly 900,000 total labor migrants leaving the country in search of wages in Russia.62 The impetus for women to join the migrant outflow stems from the evidence that while migrant remittances helped to reduce poverty rates significantly, they have also left individual house- holds substantially dependent on the incomes earned abroad.63 As securing (construction) jobs in Russia became more difficult for men in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis due to both the economic downturn and an increase in the inflow of migrants, their earnings decreased, leading most remittance-dependent households to send female household members, too, to capture employment opportunities in other sectors of the menial and low-skilled labor market of Russia.64 Thus, the available macroeconomic data suggest that women are more active in the labor market if we combine insights from domestic and migrant female labor force statistics.

The perspective presented herein adds to the existing scholarship by offering a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of *hijab* in Tajikistan: it can mediate the effects of an obviously paradoxical situation that most women have encountered. The imperatives of female docility are paramount, yet socio-economic realities push women to seek wage labor both in Tajikistan and abroad. As proposed by the new insights offered in this research, *hijab* can potentially serve as a mechanism to reconcile the pressures faced by women to seek and remain in non-gender secluded, outside-of-the-home employment (or situations that can be socially perceived as deviant), without jeopardizing

62 S. Kurbanov, "Gender Shape of Labor Migration in the Republic of Tajikistan," Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2013, 2, http://stat.tj/img/en/Gender%20aspects%20in%20migration(1).pdf (accessed January 31, 2016).

63 Danzer and Ivaschenko, "Migration Patterns in a Remittances Dependent Economy," 190.

64 Ibid., 199.

the publicly manifested image of domesticity and conformity to a patriarchal value system that are viewed as the basis for an individual woman's and her family's honorable social status.

Concluding Remarks

The centrality of the body in various political and religious projects cannot be overstated. This appears to be especially true in relation to female bodies, dress code, and, as presented in this article, head coverings. Indeed, in the discursive field, the competition in the sphere of "control of women and of their appropriate conduct had long been used to demarcate the identity and boundaries of the Muslim community" in different Islamic contexts.65 Similarly, in the context of Tajikistan it was observed that normative codes regarding role, right, and behavior of women serve as one of the most important factors differentiating between competing religious discourses, and, moreover, control over the female body (sexuality, dress code, female public sphere) might serve as a measure of success in such discursive contestation.66

In this manner, the narrative of the foreignness of *hijob* and *satri Islomi* in Tajikistan fundamentally relies on the assumption that as a new (transplant- ed) garb it also represents a new system of values and practice of religion. Such narrative also creates seemingly legitimate basis for excluding groups adhering to the new norms and values from various public goods (e.g., education, political process, rule of law) by generating, for the most part, false dichotomies of "us" vs. "them." The discourse becomes even more legitimate and consequential when scholarly research appears to support such assumptions by paying attention to those who practice such new forms of piety and noting that they also happen to don *hijab*. Thus, there appears to be a need for a timely intervention in both scholarly and policy perspectives. We should recognize that *hijob*, even if transplanted, acquired new meanings and wider audience in Tajik society and began to be used for a specific social function of reestablishing a male-dominated social order, often by women themselves, to maintain, promote and project a respectable social standing for themselves and their families. This characteristic of assimilation might pose even greater challenges for the state and be indicative of the societal pushback that it is dueto encounter in its anti-*hijab* campaign.

65 Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam, and the State*, 6.

66 Shahnoza Nozimova and Tim Epkenhans, "Negotiating Islam in Emerging Public Spheresin Contemporary Tajikistan," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*, 67, no. 3 (2013): 984.