Switching to *Satr*: An Ethnography of the Particular in Women's Choices in Head Coverings in Tajikistan

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Abstract

In the early years of the Soviet Union, women in Central Asia were forcibly unveiled in an attempt to suppress Islam and create the "new Soviet woman." A post-Soviet Islamic revival in Central Asia has brought with it the renewed practice of veiling. Women adopt hijab and other conservative head coverings for complex reasons as they seek identity and belonging in Tajikistan's evolving society. Nevertheless, the current regime views the veiled Muslim woman as a threat to the imagined national identity. The sociopolitical elite perpetuates these policies and practices, subjugating women who choose to veil. This article explores how women experience the practice of veiling in post-Soviet Tajikistan.

Keywords

Tajikistan – Islam – Hijab – ethnography – gender – Central Asia – nationalism

Sitora watched another YouTube video explaining the newest styles of hijab. She already knew how to arrange and pin it in at least five different ways. She frequently went to Korvon, the large bazaar just outside of Dushanbe, to purchase ornate beads, and jewels to add to her hijab and other clothing. Her parents did not approve of hijab and chided her for covering her head, but the Islamic revival moving swiftly through Tajik society caught hold of her as it did a growing number of young people.

Since perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the people of Central Asia have grappled with national and religious identities. Women's behavior,

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dress, and roles in both the public and private spheres have become targets of nation building and religious revival. Against the backdrop of a civil war, the secular elite's fears of Islamic revival in Tajikistan have resulted in governmental rhetoric and legislation sharply focused on the dress and behavior of women. A hallmark of the new national identity promoted by the state is a young Tajik woman in national dress. Despite increases in political and social pressure on women to adopt the state vision of the Tajik-Muslim woman, an Islamic awakening informs the construction of an alternative female Muslim identity. This article explores the push-and-pull factors women experience amid the Islamic revival as they decide whether to adopt hijab, challenge the imagined national identity, and lean toward one of Muslim piety and find social and political belonging through the enactment of Islamic practice.

I use "Islamic revival" or "Islamic awakening" to mean a societal trend toward greater awareness of Islamic principles and ideas (orthodoxy) and an increase in Islamic practice such as *namaz* (prayers), fasting, and wearing hijab (orthopraxy). It is not meant to mean a structured, formal movement with leadership or hierarchy, but rather an informal surge in the transmission of religious knowledge and enactment of religious practice by an increasing number of people within the population.

My research does not quantify an increase in Islamic orthodoxy or orthopraxy in Tajikistan, and it would be difficult to carry out quantifiable research on this subject without a longitudal study. However, other scholars of Central Asia have also described an Islamic revival, though not always using this term. For example, Michele E. Commercio describes it as "retraditionalization," and Wendell Schwab as a "piety movement."[1] This article focuses on one aspect of the Islamic revival in Tajikistan, an increase in the number of women and girls enacting the Islamic principle of wearing hijab.

Methodology

My fieldwork incorporates discussions and semi-structured interviews in June–September 2013, and June 2014 in Dushanbe and Kulob, Tajikistan. I also carried out Skype interviews with some of the women in July 2014. Follow-up on the lives of some of the women includes events as late as May 2015. This article pivots around the decisions of 15 women ages 18–56 from two extended kinship networks, exploring both their practice of wearing hijab and the transmission

1 Michele E. Commercio, "The Politics and Economics of 'Retraditionalization' in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2014, doi: 10.1080/1060586X.2014.986870; Wendell Schwab, "Islam, Fun, and Social Capital in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Affairs*, 2, no. 1 (2015): 51–70.

of religious knowledge that informs their decision whether to wear it. Access to these families was created through networking and months and even years of developing close relationships of trust. Much of my research was carried out through participant observation. I spent days and nights in the homes of different women, preparing and serving meals, interacting with their children, observing and participating in rituals reserved for women such as the *arūstalвon* (return or welcoming of a recently married female relative) and *gahvoraвandon* (a celebration of a new mother being welcomed back into full social life after relative isolation for 40 days postpartum), was instructed in the differing styles of hijab, namaz, and observed the transmission of religious knowledge through word of mouth or electronically from online recordings or DVDs. Of all the women in Tajikistan I interacted with who did or did not veil, I chose to focus on two family groups for this study. In one family, all but one woman chose to wear hijab; conversely, in the second family none of the women chose to wear hijab with one exception, providing an interesting juxtaposition.

Anthropologists have long recognized kinship relationships as the foundation of culture.2 Studying women in their kinship environment provides inti- mate details of their lives and decision making processes, while the use of surveys that may disconnect respondents from the influence of kinship ties that inform their behavior. I frame the decisions of these women in what Lila Abu-Lughod describes as "ethnography of the particular," agentive acts made in a particular time and place under the influence of several sociocultural fac- tors.3 I hope that because the two families I discuss are from very different socioeconomic backgrounds and parts of Tajik society, I am able to capture some of the diverse ways women come to decisions about hijab. Ethnographers portray only snapshots of the lives of their research subjects; this privileged information is in some ways always a convenience sample and should be considered such, rather than a rigid characterization of the entire population.4

I also incorporate discussions from media and social media in Tajikistan collected from public Facebook postings in Facebook-hosted groups and comments from online media outlets between June 2012 and May 2015. At some points I was a member of some of the groups; other times informants alerted me to discussions regarding hijab that I then copied and pasted into my

2 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders a Study in Social Anthropology* (1906; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2012); Henry Lewis Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1870; repr., Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2012).

3 Lila Abu-Lughod "Writing Against Culture." Pp. 137-62 in Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, edited by R. G. Fox. Santa Fe, nm: School of American Research Press. 1991.

4 Mitchell Duneier, "How Not to Lie with Ethnography," *Sociological Methodology*, 41 (2011): 1–11.

research collection. The groups I followed include Platforma, Ya Dushanbenets, Ya Dushanbenets 2, Tarbiya Omoni, and Tajik Mama, some of which are cited.

The sermons of influential mullahs in Tajikistan regarding the practice of women veiling (including niqab and hijab) retrieved from public websites and videos uploaded to YouTube are incorporated into the discussion. I also use press reports from Tajikistan's independent and state media agencies, and official government statements on women's dress in my analysis.

Finally, I use hijab and *satr* (the word most commonly used in Tajikistan for hijab) interchangeably throughout the article.

Background

The traditional Central Asian practice of women veiling was the antithesis to the Soviet conceptualization of the emancipation of women. On International Women's Day, March 8 1927, a mass unveiling, known as *faranjipartoi* (veil throwing) or *faranjisuzi* (veil burning) to people in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, forced women to remove the heavy cotton and horsehair *faranji* (Tajiki) or *paranja* (Russian) (veil covering the body and face) they traditionally wore.5 Sporadic but ongoing violence followed for the next few years. Soviet Russians killed men who resisted the unveiling of women; and women who unveiled were often killed in villages by male relatives and neighbors.6 Gregory Massel notes the women who unveiled were no longer considered Muslim by their countrymen. Within society, women were increasingly viewed as either Muslim or communist, but not both.7

At the close of 1991, Tajikistan was forced into independent statehood, an unwilling victim of the collapse of the Soviet Union.8 The bubblings of pre-collapse rifts

5 *Hujum* is the word used in most scholarship. It comes from the Arabic word for assault or attack and is used in Uzbek. However, the Tajik word is *faranjipartoi*, best translated as "veil throwing." The other word used in Tajik is *faranjisuzi* (veil burning). Rather than *paranja,* the word *faranji* is used in Tajik. Kamp notes that some women unveiled before sovietization. See Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington, Press, 2006).

6 Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, p 150-185. Also see, Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Northrop *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2004)

7 Massell, The Surrogate Proletariat, 225.

8 A nationalist movement began before independence, attached to a pan-Persian ideology. See Glenn E. Curtis, *Tajikistan: A Country Study* (Washington DC: GPO for the Library of Congress,

and the political motivations of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and its allies threw the country into civil war as the Soviet elite struggled to cling to power. After five years of fighting, Moscow brokered a peace deal and left the old regime at the helm. The government of President Emomali Rahmon worked to create an historical narrative and national identity without the appearance of religious elements that could lend support to the defeated IRPT. It focused on maintaining the character of the state and citizens as secular.9

Anthropologist Gillian Tett observed that while men's religious activities began to increase at the collapse of the Soviet Union in Tajikistan, women's did not. This was simply because women's religious practice in Tajikistan—prayers, recitation of the Koran, and other activities—remained prevalent during the Soviet period.10 After the civil war ended in 1997, Tajikistan's government sought to reify the state, changing the name of the state religious apparatus from the muftiyat to the *Shuroi ulamo* (religious council). It is hard to say what affinity the public initially had toward the new council, but it quickly lost face and was not considered anything other than anti-Islamic. In 2004 the Council of Ulamo issued a fatwa prohibiting women to pray in mosques. In 2005, the minister of education issued a statement banning hijab in schools, and in 2007 it instituted a mandatory dress code that reinforced the ban.11 Much like the Soviet hujum (Russian: *khudzhum*), fatwas derived by the state apparatus and legalism sought to cut women out of religious life. Further, the government ban on women visiting mosques reduced women's access to IRPT political rhetoric and the speeches of politically inclined mullahs. It also served to cur- tail women's ability to pass religious practices onto their children.

1996), http://countrystudies.us/tajikistan/24.htm (accessed December 2014); Dagikhudo Dagiev, *Regime Change in Central Asia Stateness, Nationalism, and Political Change in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

9 Olivier Roy labels the promoted national identity of Tajikistan *Islamo-nationalism.* This term has also been adopted by other scholars. However, in my opinion this term needs more explanation. The government actively legislates against the practice of Islam and agitates against Islamic practices in other ways. Therefore, when it is claimed that the national identity of Tajikistan (and indeed the government) can be characterized as Islamo- nationalism, it is not clear to me what this means. See Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*, rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

10 Gillian Tett, "Guardians of the faith?": gender and religion in an (ex) Soviet Tajik village. Chapter 6. (pp. 160–190). El-Solh, Camillia Fawzi., and Judy Mabro, editors. *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality*. English ed. Providence, R.I.: [New York]: Berg, 1994.

11 U.S. Department of State, "Tajikistan International Religious Freedom Report, 2007," http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2007/90235.htm (accessed December 2014).

While in Tajikistan political Islam—the IRPT—has been undermined by the political elite, a socially driven Islamic revival created the opportunity for political belonging. Although not deliberately political, it includes acts of resistance within the cultural hegemony that create a social climate fertile for political Islamism. Emile Durkheim theorized that beliefs and practice in action unite individuals "into one single moral community."12 Tajikistan presents an interesting case, then, wherein almost all actors in society accept a Muslim identity, but disagree on what that moral-Muslim community and identity is.

Social Schisms

The discourse of the national identity of the Tajik-Muslim woman is centered on externality versus internality; that is, the performance (actions) versus the ethical internality of behavior. Facebook and Odnoklassniki (the popular Russian-based social networking site) networks from Central Asia often focus on Islam. The virtues of hijab are frequently extolled and sometimes debated. Translated excerpts from the following discussion in the Facebook group Ya Dushanbinets 2 in August 2014 underscore perceived threats that *satr* (the word for hijab used by both Russian and Tajik speakers in Tajikistan) poses to the secular cultural hegemony.

> **Natalya**:13
> Another question that interests me!
>
> I was recently very frightened by the abundance of girls in satr. And obviously very bright makeup and even more "bright" behavior. Moreover, women 40 and older are less likely to [wear] satr. Is this a temporary fashion [trend], or is it forever?
>
> **Leah**:
> Temporary. Fools.
>
> **Tanya**:
> When I was in Kurgan I did not see any woman in satr and was pleasantly surprised!

12 Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 44.

13 All names have been changed. I chose Russian names for posters who had Russian namesand Tajik names for posters who had Tajik names.

Faridun:
For some of them it is a fashion, for others—a way of life. Without a sociological survey among them, you cannot exactly understand.

Farangis:
It kills me that most of the girls in satr lead a bad lifestyle. They are onsocial networks, and do not behave properly.14

Saodat:
One said—her husband forced her.

Ludmila:
It's more for fashion of course!

Leah:
Stupid fashion, which is nothing but irritation. Sorry for the harshness, but it's not about being true believers … these "fashionistas" have no idea about the canons of religion.

Shuhrat:
Crazy. Most of them lead a bad lifestyle … stupid fashion. … It's irritating… It's pleasantly surprising when I haven't seen a woman in satr.

Faridun:
Excuse me … we certainly have no right to discuss people this way.

Shuhrat:
Faridun, why? This discussion is not about a specific person.

Faridun:
Well, somehow it is ugly, especially talking about girls.

Shuhrat:
I think it's both possible and necessary to discuss trends.

14 The commenter is a woman in the process of using Facebook, but her comment denotes her differentiation between herself and a young, presumably unmarried woman who is using social media.

Leah:
I explained my attitude only to those who use religion and satr to cover their own shortcomings and indiscretions. My attitude to a true believer is diametrically different.

Faridun:
Girls have the right to their "shortcomings," including discussions of each other.

Munisa:
But you must admit many of our sisters contradict *Satr avrat* (the hidingof the body)—*Odobi libospushii* [proper cultural dress]

Timur:
Looking at the man on the street for a couple of minutes, can we deter- mine for what purpose he uses his clothes, as fashion or to cover up? For example, today I am wearing a T-shirt and jeans, how have I used them? How can you tell if the girl you saw for maybe 15 seconds on the street in satr is a true believer or not?

Suhrob:
I would never suggest in any of the [social media] groups that we shouldnot raise this topic, why?

1. The secular world of fashion changes day-by-day. For secular society it is the norm; the religious world of fashion also evolves, and unfortunately secular society doesn't like this.
2. If secular radicalism grows, religion grows.
3. Satr in Islam is not clothes, but a law of dress. This is *farz* (commandment), is thus obligatory for both men and women.
4. If secular society will accept this as normal as it accepts secular fashion, then believe me, it isn't a problem.

Finally, I agree with Timur. How can you tell if the girl you saw for maybe 15 seconds on the street in satr is a true believer or not?

Leah:
How can you tell? It's very simple. A girl sits at 11 pm in a restaurant, smoking, drinking alcoholic cocktails, with paint [make-up] like an Apache Indian on the warpath, neighing like a horse [laughing loudly], and drawing attention of all the surrounding men with her behavior. But IN SATR? The discussion is namely about these [type of girls], and namely

these are becoming more and more [common]. I personally considerthat they are simply a disgrace to religion. IMHO.

Timur:
Are you suggesting they remove satr and behave this way in European clothes, huh?

Leah:
Well, at least it will be honest, or correspond to the clothes they are wearing. I believe the girls described completely lack understanding of the requirements for a woman in Islam, and [lack] understanding of the religion in general.

Timur:
About bright makeup and challenging behavior, I agree. With or without satr, I think make-up should be for their own husbands. So you believe that drinking, smoking, laughing … is for those who don't cover their heads? Just understand, I think, we've had enough already of judging people by their clothes. Let people dress how they want, do what they want, as long as their freedom restrict and bother others.

Leah:
To begin with, if a girl is wearing satr, she accepts and complies with Sharia … no drinking, no smoking—visits to restaurants without being accompanied by her husband [brother, father, son] are FORBIDDEN. … So if women are not willing to follow all the precepts of Islam, it is not necessary to show off with their headscarves.

In this discussion the power struggle lies in the opportunity to claim the construction of the legitimate Muslim woman. Michel Foucault wrote,

> How can one analyze the connection between the ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others? The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false-this is what I would call "political spirituality."15

15 ~~Michel~~ Foucault, "Questions of Method" in The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller eds. 1991 (Hemel Wheatsheaf: Hemel Hempstead); Ali Rizvi, "Foucault, Iran, and Revolution," Foucauldian Reflections, October 9, 2004,

The victor in these conversations wins the political-spiritual, claiming the true or legitimate identity of the Muslim woman. The victor dictates and sanctions her religious practices, her habitus, and determines who has a right to political belonging within the constructed identity of a Muslim woman.

Regarding the veil, Austrian diplomat and thinker Andreas Stadler mused, "We humans have more potential for hatred when the object our hatred is part of our own identity."16 Because persons in Tajikistan almost universally consider them- selves Muslim, women who do not veil find it more than irritating when other Muslim women do because it threatens their own identity as a Muslim. Benedict Anderson wrote that a nation (and thus national identity) is defined by imagination rather than "hard" structures, "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."17

Women and girls who wear hijab challenge the imagined national identity. They are considered too religious, backward, *qişloqī* (villagers—used as a pejorative), and uneducated. Similar to the Soviets before them, for the Tajik elite, hijabi women are seen as the antithesis to modernity. The promotion of this idea is ever present. For example President Rahmon addressed young people at the National Agrarian University to mark the Day of Unity on June 26, 2015, saying, "Explain to all the girls, those who wear hijab at times, first of all this is from lack of education and knowledge. They do not have enough knowledge. They are misguided. They don't even know what they are doing in life."18 The official website of the IRPT issued an article refuting the illiteracy of hijabi girls and women and insisting that they are not misguided.19

The sharp divide in society over hijab is further reflected in social media as in passages from the following edited discussion that took place in March 2013 in the Facebook political group Platforma. The moderators posted a provocative

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http://foucauldians.blogspot.com/2004/10/foucault-iran-and-revolution.html (accessed December 2014).

16 Andreas Stadler, "It's Not About the Veil, It's About Us" (speech, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, May 2009) http://www.acfny.org/category/exhibitions/the-veil/its-not-about -the-veil-its-about-us/ (accessed November 2014).

17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1993), 6.

18 Emomali Rahmon, "Emomali dubora kofir budani xudro ikror kard" [Emomali proved again that he is an infidel], June 26, 2015. Uploaded by Filmi Online, June 28, 2015, https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-4eVcYrJR8&feature=youtu.be (accessed June 28, 2015).

19 "Korşinosi toçik: Hiçов вema'rifatī, gumrohī va вesavodī nest" [Tajik expert: There is no ignorance, misguidance, or lack of knowledge], July 2, 2015, http://nahzat.tj/14824 -korshinosi-toik-iob-bemarifat-gumro-va-besavod-nest.html (accessed July 2, 2015).

image ostensibly of a mother with her daughter in black burkas standing nextto black garbage bags.20

Sino:
[Referring to the moderators] Stupid people. Make their faces black. [Pejorative expression]. You like to gaze at women's bodies. Just imagine how a strange man [non-family member] will look with lust [intimate desire] at your sisters, mothers, and wives' breasts and naked legs. What do you imagine then, *dayus* [pejorative: signifying weak].

Manuchehr:
These *shaitans* [devils] are fighting with their own god, they do not even care about the hijab of Muslim girls.

Azim:
It's not about how they look. What's important is they have come to this [wearing satr]? If this is their conscious choice founded on religious principles, we don't have the right to judge them. But if so they were forced to [wear satr], then this is something worth considering.

Sino:
On my honor, I am surprised how these people (moderators) have such enmity toward Muslims, let me see the faces of all moderators in the grave. [MP–Moderators Platforma], I don't understand, do you actually stand on the positions of secular fascism or, decided to tease believers for publicity? But my friends, [the] right to believe in his own God is in each of us, it is guaranteed by the Constitution and the Conscience. Let us respect the law and each other.

Manuchehr:
Umed, You correctly note the behavior of the [MP] moderators of Platforma as fascism. I think MP are not Muslim, and not even Tajik. Who can offend their own people, but only one who has deeply hostile feelings toward this people?

You like to have your wives, daughters, sisters, etc. walked naked and half-naked? Who's stopping you? But you have no right to tell anyone else how to dress.

20 Lila Abu-Lughod discusses the use of the same image in her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, ma: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Parvin:
So if she is not in hijab she is naked or half-naked? Interesting logic. In the days of the Women's Union in Tajikistan they were not in Arab clothing; were they all immoral? European women do not wear Arab dress, are they also immoral? And those that are in hijab, burkas, and the saints … so holy many glow in the dark.

Manuchehr:
The discussion is about personal choice. How to dress is every woman's personal choice. We must learn to respect the choices of others. … What you insist on calling "Arab dress" for women, hijab, is considered native [to Tajikistan] and godly.

Umed:
Manuchehr, my friend, you are too dogmatic. The truth is that a large number of people, including the very educated, are nervous about the increase of religious sentiments our society. And due to the fact that their scientific, or pseudo-scientific European worldview is not satisfied with the explanation of this phenomenon, they are looking for salvation in a position that is actually counterproductive.

If you didn't know, the Soviet Union was dominated by the Bolshevik ideology of fascism, and the citizens of the country did not have religious freedom. By the way, some religious fanatics like yourself are against other clothes, for example against the British jacket and tie. You are you are also no different.

Rustam:
What makes you think that if a girl does not wear hijab, by default she is *prostitutka* [prostitute] naked, etc.???? Personally, I like it when our girls dress in national Tajik beautiful dresses.

Community Religious Leaders and Transfer of Religious Knowledge

Influential mullahs such as Eshoni Nuriddinjon of the Turajonzoda family, and Hoji Mirzo (Hoji Mirzo Ibronov) deliver sermons disseminated by word of mouth, social media, DVDs, and their own websites regarding the obligation of women to wear satr. Women often seek out distributed sermons like the following by Hoji Mirzo, and are thus persuaded to wear satr:

> A Muslim woman must wear a satr. God tells us this. It means, if our wives, our daughters do not wear satr, then we are the ones to answer for them in front of God. God says, I will ask you about your wife and children, if you passed them God's words. I will ask you. If we passed God's words to our families, good; if not, then we are sinners.21

It is notable that while women seek out these sermons themselves, the excerpt is clearly addressed to men. The trend to adopt satr and the prominence of male speech about women's dress has sometimes led outsiders to the belief and portrayal of hijabi women in Tajikistan as creatures without agency subordinate to male domination.22 Certainly there are cases in which violent beatings by male relatives are associated with a woman's refusal or failure to properly wear hijab; however there is also violence, disenfranchisement, refusal of employment, and threats of divorce for wearing hijab.23 Either way, these discussions decenter the Muslim woman. It is critical that the subjects, the women who wear hijab, are the center of these discussion. The women must speak for of themselves.

Ethnography of the Particular

Zebo was raised in a large family in a village in Khatlon. Her family owned a food-processing firm and sent the children to a private school in a nearby city. Zebo advanced quickly in her studies, won many educational opportunities, and married into an upper class and respected family when she was 24 years

21 "Hoji Mirzo dar Kazokiston," June 16, 2014, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SS-o0-BMauY (accessed November 5, 2014).

22 Leslie Hough, "Tajikistan's Competing Social and Political Forces: The Politics of Traditional versus Women's Dress," Washington, DC: IREX, 2011.

23 One glaring example took place in August 2014 when a mother-in-law took her daughter- in-law to court for wearing hijab—claiming the family was afraid of women who wear hijab and pray, and demanded legal action to force her to discontinue the practice: "Himojati dodras az kelini hiçoвpūş va raddi da'voi xuşdoman" [Judge defends heejabi daughter-in-law and rejects mother-in-law's demand], Ozodagon, August 2, 2014, http://www.ozodagon.com/17440-shikoyati-hushdoman-az-boloi-kelini-iobpshash-ba-dodgo. html (accessed August 2, 2014); "Zakrytaya po sobstvennomu zhelaniyu" [Closed according to own desire], VIP Zone Online, June 28, 2014, http://vipzoneonline.ru/life/468-zakrytaya-po-sobstvennomu-zhelaniyu.html (accessed June 28, 2014). In contrast, a woman was killed in June 2015 by her husband for refusing to wear hijab. Ozodagon, July 1, 2015, http://www.ozodagon.com/22338-atli-amsar-baroi-iob-dar-sud.html (accessed July 16, 2015).

old. When Zebo's future husband came to her and asked for her hand in marriage, he asked if she would agree to wear hijab. Zebo already wore rumol (a brightly colored headscarf that does not completely cover the hair), just as her mother and older sister did. She agreed to wear it and believed that it was the will of Allah that women wear hijab. However, after the wedding, she refused. She said, "Probably it is *farz* (obligation or commandment), and I should wear it. But after marriage I told him no. I told him you will look at other women if I cover my hair and don't wear makeup."

Zebo feared her husband would take a second wife. Although according to her religious leanings of orthopraxy she would wear satr, she chose not to in the context of her situation. She viewed a resurgence of polygyny, allowed in Islam, as a threat to her marital relationship. This is compounded by the fact that her father had two wives while she was growing up in the Soviet era, and her mother (the first wife) did not want her own daughters to experience polygyny within their own marriages. Her mother made a point of working very hard to educate her daughters so they would have career options and be able to divorce if their husbands took a second wife. Although she accepted orthodox ideas and practices regarding hijab, her decision to not wear it reflects her agency in the particular context of avoiding a polygynous marriage. She considered herself deeply religious, and said that before the birth of her child, she prayed five times a day whenever possible and recited the Koran. She did not do these things as regularly when we spoke about it, the duties of housewife and mother occupying her time.

Zebo's child's nanny attended classes for women on the Koran and Islam at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran regularly. She then passed on to Zebo and Zebo's sister-in-laws what she learned and gained respect as a knowledgeable woman of Islam in the community. Other women in the community perceived to be knowledgeable about Islam did not necessarily attend classes. A few times I was introduced to a woman who other women called a *bibi khal-ifa* (woman with great understanding of Islam). I discovered each time she did not have special training, but rather was self-taught by her own reading and seeking out sermons to listen to—and she was bold enough to claim knowledge. This is contrary to suggestions by some scholars that in Tajikistan religious training has created a particularly educated class of women religious teachers and leaders.24 This is to be expected since any formal training was disrupted by the civil war, law prohibits women's attendance at mosques, and

24 Habiba Fathi, "Otines: The Unknown Women Clerics of Central Asian Islam," *Central Asian Survey*, 16, no. 1 (1997): 27–43; Habiba Fathi, "Gender, Islam, and Social Change in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey*, 25, no. 3 (2006): 303–317.

formal structure for women's religious education like that at the embassy is rare.

Unlike most Tajik families, at her marriage Zebo moved from her natal home to a renovated flat in Dushanbe near her husband's family members and was able to continue her studies to meet her career goals. Zebo's husband's oldest sister, Mahina, was married with two children and either wore rumol or no headscarf at all. Shahnoza, Zebo's 24-year-old sister-in-law who lived with her and her husband in Dushanbe, chose to wear rumol and short sleeves except for prayer times, when she wore satr.

However Sitora, the youngest sister-in-law, a 19 year-old university student, wore satr. This created some family tensions. Sitora's parents did not approve of satr and encouraged her not to wear it. She recited namaz five times a day alongside her sister Shahnoza; recited the Koran, listened to Hoji Mirzo, was an excellent university student, and loved to shop. When asked how she decided to wear satr while the rest of her family did not, she replied, "I studied the Koran and understood this was the proper way. At first it was strange. But then the more I wore it, the more I liked it."

Sitora explained how she also began lowering her hemlines to the ankle (although she admitted this was also a fashion trend) and sleeves dropped past her wrist to the palms of her hands. "I like going out and just going, no one can see … I want to wear niqab, but it is against the law." As mentioned, Sitora frequented bazaars, purchasing shiny and glittering ornamental beads to add to her clothing in elaborate designs. Turkish styles and the Chanel label enthralled her, and she very often added Chanel logos to her hijab.25 These actions pointed to the influence of fashion and social trends as much as they show a personal devotion to Islam, a phenomenon also noted by Annelies Moors in "Fashionable Muslims."26

Sitora married in May 2015 when she was 20. She wore a trendy full white wedding gown with a slender, white, silky hijab. It is traditional in Tajikistan for the bride to order several new dress ensembles for her presentation, where she models the clothing in succession. Sitora adhered to this tradition and had several photographs taken in different traditional or "national" clothing. Instead

25 In a December 18, 2014, email, Chanel responded to my email inquiry about their marketing to Muslim women, and the pirating of their brand in Central Asia. "We are delighted to learn of your interest in our legendary brand. Since Chanel is a privately owned company, we are unable to accommodate your request for any information. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience that this may cause you."

26 Annalies Moors, "Fashionable Muslims: Notions of Self, Religion, and Society in San'a," *Fashion Theory*, 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 319–346.

of hijab, she chose the traditional sheer veil and held it over her head, toka, a traditional square hat, or nothing. In this particular context, her adherence to orthopraxy was not strong enough to subvert familial and social customs, although she continued wearing hijab after the wedding.

Maryam's family background was very different from Zebo and Sitora's. Maryam and her extended family lived in villages outside the city. While the women in Zebo's family were highly educated and, in general, planned on a family and children alongside a career, the women in Maryam's family usually married around 16 or 17 years old. They usually left school between 14 and 16 years of age. Working outside the home was acceptable if necessary, however; it brought stigma upon husbands because they were not the sole breadwinners. Maryam wore rumol before her marriage at 18. She began wearing hijab shortly after her wedding when a neighbor woman explained to her that it was her duty as a Muslim woman. Having a wife in hijab was unexpected by her husband. She said, "He got used to it. I am hidden from the gaze. I like that myhusband likes it."

Maryam's aunts, sisters, and cousins shared a similar background and similar attitudes. Mastura, an aunt, said, "My husband didn't like it. But I told him I like to wear it. All the women do this. Then he didn't say anything about it. All of my family does it. All the women wear satr."

Gulchera is 38 years old and began wearing satr when she was 30 years old. She said, "My husband didn't want me to, but I did it anyway. It is an Islamic rule." When asked how she knew it was an Islamic rule, or how did she find out about this she said, "My brother told me." Gulchera explained she wasn't comfortable wearing satr at first, but then got used to it. She added, "Allah will punish us if we don't wear satr … at first my husband didn't like it, but now he does." Malika is 27 and the mother of three daughters. She began wearing satr seven years ago, "Satr is written by Allah. I personally have a neighbor. She read all this and explained it to me … my mother does not wear satr and did not wear rumol. Then two to four years ago my father died, and she started wearing rumol." Malika and other women often note that their mothers, who were raised in the Soviet era, wear rumol and not hijab. However, sometimes young women adopting hijab influences the older generation to follow suit. It this case, it was clarified that her mother began wearing rumol only after her husband died, a Tajik tradition. During the marriage, she did not cover her head.

Shafoat married into the family when she was 17 after a young engagement at just shy of 15. She attended city schools, but her conservative family—and she herself—desired an early marriage. Shafoat did not cover her head until marriage, and did so with a simple traditional headscarf to honor her new in-laws. She lived with her in-laws for a number of years before she and her

husband and children moved to their own flat. While all other members of the family wear hijab, she chooses not to. She did not seem bothered by this, and no one pressured her to wear it. She was asked once by her husband why she did not wear it when all other did, and she responded that she had an uncovered head before marriage and covered it now out of respect, and that was enough.

The women in the family all discussed gaining religious knowledge from word-of-mouth, from neighbors or other relatives. One woman reported that she heard from another female relative about hijab and assured me that her relative read Arabic and was very educated in Islam. However, when I talked with the woman herself and other family members, it was clear she did not read Arabic and had very little education because the civil war had erupted when she was a child. She had memorized a few verses of the Koran and said she started wearing hijab when others did. This informal learning and informal authority-granting creates an unordered, rather than hierarchal dispersion of religious knowledge, leading to a horizontally propelled social-Islam.

Zarangez, a 33-year-old woman explained, "I wear it because I like it. [Before] in Tajikistan, the communists would not allow it [hijab], now everyone can, so they do. When *begona* [non-kin] men come into the home, we do this to be hidden from *chashmoni begona* [eyes of non-kin men]." I asked her when she would have her daughter, who was nine years old, cover her head. She said, "She already does. There is a neighbor man who scolds [everyone in the neigh- borhood] if girls don't cover their heads. So we do." Zarangez said her own hus- band didn't care either way and doesn't discuss satr at home in regard to herself or their daughter. She said, "My husband didn't like it. He asked me, 'Why are you wearing that?' But I told him I would wear it, all the other women were wearing it."

Most of the women adopting hijab did not grow up in the Soviet era. Zebo was a young teen when the Soviet Union collapsed. The inscribed collective memory of the younger generation of Muslim women in Tajikistan is often one of Soviet suppression of religious piety, and this oppression must be resisted. Zarangez's realization that women wear hijab now because they can now with- out the oppression of the Soviet government should not be overlooked.

Hijab as Political

Resistance to contemporary power structures is also present within this practice of veiling. In a move hauntingly similar to the Soviet hujum on International Women's Day in 1927, on International Women's Day March 2015, President Rahmon addressed the women of the nation and expounded upon the hazards

of clothing "alien" to Tajikistan. He announced that government officials would mandate dress codes for women working in public spaces. The dangers of religious extremism and lightly veiled references to the civil war were cited as justification for the new measures (see Appendix). The state demands that women wear "traditional" or "national" clothing were followed by raids on hijab vendors, women's black apparel, and instructions to the police to curb the "foreign dress" of women. In some cases, women working in bazaars were hauled to local police stations and forced to remove their hijab.27

Women who wear hijab do not necessarily consciously create an alternate identity outside the national identity of the Tajik Muslim woman, but engage in piety within the framework of a socially propelled Islamic revival. There is no evidence in Tajikistan that the act of wearing hijab leads to dangerous religious extremism, or that women in hijab promote radical Islam, which then threatens the security of Tajikistan or the Rahmon regime. Resistance scholars Stellan Vinthagen and Mona Lilja suggest resistance as "a subaltern response to power; a practice that challenges and which might undermine power." They further posit that resistance does not have to be conscious, but contain the possibility to change the current power structure.28 In this way wearing hijab can be seen as a resistance, changing the social power structure to one of piety. The piety of the veil and other modes of conservative female dress in Tajikistan threaten the nationalists' imaginary. In one example, in March 2013 Minister of Education Abdujabbor Rahmonov demanded that women wear high-heeled shoes to the university and colleges and criticized them as unfeminine, sloppy, and having poor posture.29 The influential mullah Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda responded,

27 "Militsiya Tadzhikistana boretsya s khidzhabami" [Police of Tajikistan battle with hijab], Islam Today, March 30, 2015, http://islam-today.ru/novosti/2015/03/30/milicia-tadzikistana-boretsa-s-hidzabami/ (accessed March 30, 2015); "Pervyi zamministra mvd Tadzhikistana ozabochen tem chto tadzhikskiye zhenshchiny nosyat chuzhuyu odezhdu" [First Deputy Interior Minister of Tajikistan is concerned that Tajik women wear foreign clothes], Ozodagon, March 28, 2015, Accessed 28 March 2015 http://catoday.org/centrasia/19033-pervyy-zamministra-mvd-tadzhikistana-ozabochen-tem-chto-tadzhikskie-zhenschiny-nosyat-chuzhuyu-odezhdu.html (accessed March 28, 2015); Kajumarsi Ato and Mirzonabii Xoliqzod, "Raisi Xuçand: Zanon libosi toçiki pushand, na 'eroni' va 'afghoni'" [Chairman of Khujand: Women wear Tajik clothes, not "Iranian" and "Afghani"]. Radio Ozodi, March 27, 2015, http://www.ozodi.org/content/mayor-of-khujand-city-about-tajik-women-dress/26924034.html (March 27, 2015).

28 Stellan Vinthagen and Mona Lilja, "Understanding Resistance: Exploring Definitions, Perspectives, Forms, and Implications. Unpublished paper.

29 "Abdudzhabbor Rakhmonov vnov' v tsentre skandala" [Abdujabbor Rakhmonov again at the center of a scandal], April 4, 2013, http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/abdudzhabbor-rakhmonov-vnov-v-tsentre-skandala (accessed April 4, 2013).

> Usually *zani fosiqa* [a sexually promiscuous woman] wears those types of shoes and they make sounds while walking. Wearing and selling those types of shoes for women is not acceptable. In the surah "an-Nour" [The Light], verse 31, while talking about Muslim women Allah says, "[they] should not knock on the ground with their feet to inform others about the beauties they wear." It means in this verse Allah forbids the sound. … But if the high-heeled shoes [with condition that the heels are not too high] do not make any sound, and they are not linked with *zanhoi fosiqa*, and are not harmful for women, then there is no fear, *inshallah*, in wearing and selling them. But of course it's better for women not to wear these types of shoes, especially when medicine has proven that wearing high heel shoes is harmful.

For practitioners, wearing the veil transcends fashion and rises to a spiritual plane. At the same time wearing satr creates a parallel cultural hegemony. Thus, the veil, rooted in a belief in Allah and farz, embodies Foucault's idea of the political-spiritual experience.30 For a woman in Tajikistan the practice of wearing hijab is the visible manifestation of her identity as a Muslim woman; a shift away from the relic of the dual identity of the secular Soviet-Muslim woman, and away from the new state-driven national identity.

Conclusion

In Tajikistan, the practice of veiling has the power to contest social and political power structures, approaching a theory of political spirituality. A woman's desire to wear hijab is contextualized by cultural pressures, fashion trends, historical processes, and current political processes. A socially driven Islamic revival has caused religious knowledge about Islamic practices, namely hijab, to be transferred through informal ways. Women seek religious knowledge and share religious understanding about orthodox practices, like hijab, mostly by word of mouth, neighbor-to-neighbor, and woman-to-woman.

30 Michiel Leezenberg, "Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran," in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience*, ed. James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 99–115; Janet Afray and Kevin B. Anderson, "Revisiting Foucault and the Iranian Revolution," *New Politics*, X-1, no. 37 (2014), http://newpol.org/content/revisiting-foucault-and-iranian- revolution (accessed December 2014).

Government structures regard the spread of veiling among women and girls as a threat to the current political regime and the imagined collective national identity. Because women and girls who wear hijab challenge the socio-political hegemony, officials link hijabi women and girls to the civil war and extremist organizations. In the early years of the Soviet Union, violence, including the forced unveiling of women in Central Asia, was used in attempts to suppress Islam and create the new Soviet woman. Contemporary rhetoric and legislation mimic Soviet ideology and practice, as elites seek to suppress religious learning and orthopraxy.

My research shows that amid these forces, women's experiences and practice of wearing hijab is imbued with socio-spiritual meaning. Most importantly, women's choice to wear hijab is situational, or particular. Understanding these cultural webs through ethnographic research provides deeper insight into current social and political dynamics in Tajikistan and offers the opportunity to see beyond the veil.

Appendix

President Emomali Rahmon's speech
International Women's Day
March 8, 2015

Dear women and mothers!

Recently a trend of worshiping an alien culture and the pull of women and girls of the country toward it [this alien culture], and the propaganda of foreign clothes in some cities and regions of the country has become a disturbingprocess.

A sense of admiration for the foreign and imitation regarding clothing, behavior, communication among women and girls may have a negative effect on the strength of the foundations of national culture.

According to scientific ethnographic sources, from ancient times our people had beautiful female apparel, our women and girls never wore black clothes. … However, some Tajik girls and women [now] dress in black…

If some of the women and girls, because of fashion, imitate a similar style of apparel, then they spread similar (styles) clothes among our women and girls with the goal of the promotion of imposing ideas, and they want to form in our country yet another new extremist movement.

According to recent data, some girls and women dressed in black go to the funeral of strangers and try to promote everything foreign to our ancient his- tory and cultural ideas among the women participating at the funeral.

However, the relevant authorities, persons in charge of the social sphere, active women and parents do not to take any measures to prevent this phenomenon, and all of this is also the responsibility of the state.

In this regard, it is necessary that the Ulama Council, Center for Islamic Studies, Committees on Women and the Family, Youth, Sport and Tourism, in the affairs of religion, ordering traditions and national ceremonies on television and radio, together with the heads of regions, cities and regions have taken measures to prevent the spread of foreign culture and apparel, the results will be systematically reported to the Government.

The Tajikmatlubot Union, the chairmen of regions, cities and districts jointly entrusted to develop fashions with fashion models, clothes for people working in the markets, shopping centers, cafeterias, restaurants and other public places and to control the use of such clothing.

The historical experience of the past and present realities of the country, which did not attach great importance to the issue of strengthening the family, show that such indifference is the reason for collision with a sharp spiritual and demographic crisis.

Therefore, we must strive to protect the family as the most important social value, firmly maintain the true face, the true essence and value of the traditional Tajik family, as the sacred and invaluable foundation of our nation.

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